

POETRY & PROGRESS  
IN RUSSIA  
BY ROSA NEWMARCH



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POUSHKIN

POETRY AND PROGRESS  
IN RUSSIA  
BY ROSA NEWMARCH  
WITH SIX FULL-PAGE PORTRAITS

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TO THE MEMORY OF  
MY FRIEND  
VLADIMIR STASSOV  
† OCTOBER 23, 1906

(SL 2a, p. 147)

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“On neither hand the comfort of the dawn !  
Night beyond night, through which the eye may pierce.  
My years of youth have fled and left no trace,  
Like flashing meteors through the winter skies.”

PLESTCHEIEV.

“There is not a single modern Russian poet of note who does not  
celebrate his own funeral rites.”—DOBROLIOUBOV.



## PREFACE

THIS volume of essays makes no pretension to be a systematic review of Russian poetry as a whole. For the benefit of readers to whom the subject may be entirely new, I have prefaced my studies of some individual poets by an introductory section dealing more generally with the history of Russian poetry before the advent of Poushkin ; but it would be doing an injustice to a great and complex subject should any novice in Russian literature be tempted to take these essays as an exhaustive treatment of the national poets and their work. On the other hand, more sophisticated readers may perhaps question the value of a book which takes no account of Poushkin's gifted contemporary Yazykov, of Alexis Tolstoi—sometimes called the Russian Walter Scott—of Shevchenko, the singer of the Ukraine, of Plestcheiev, Maikov, and many other names well known in Russian poetry. I may forestall such criticisms by disclaiming all intention of drawing a bird's-eye view of my subject. For the scholar and the student there

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exist in English, French and German a fair number of books which cover a much wider field of information, but I should be glad to feel that this book would appeal to the timid curiosity of many who would certainly shrink from a long index of Russian names. For such is our natural reluctance to face a linguistic difficulty, that although I have many pleasant memories of a public listening with evident attention and interest to long papers on Russian art or literature, I feel convinced I have never yet succeeded in impressing upon any member of my audience the correct pronunciation of a Russian name. This is not because my pronunciation is excessively bad, or the name very hard to pronounce, but because the British attitude to Russian names reminds me of those people who assure you they could not swallow an oyster if they tried.

Let it be clearly understood, then, that I have merely projected upon the screen a few representative silhouettes, such as may serve to show that in Russia—as throughout the civilised world—the poets have been the pioneers of liberty and enlightenment. The individual poets whom I have chosen as specially characterising certain phases of Russian culture are : Poushkin, the typical poet of the period of Alexander I, who reflected the cosmopolitanism of the eighteenth century and foreshadowed the realism of the nineteenth ; Koltsov and Nikitin, the people's poets ; Nekras-

## Preface

sov, filled with bitter resentment, aggravated by the iron-handed régime of Nicholas I; Khomiakov, the poet of Slavophilism; and Nadson, in whose poetry we find a temperamental pessimism and a mild socialism held in check by a pliancy and resignation characteristic of the Jewish race.

A few years ago, when my essays on the popular poets were first written in lecture form, it would have seemed rash to count upon even a limited public likely to be interested in the life and works of half a dozen representative Russian poets. But recent stirring events, the Russo-Japanese War and the subsequent struggles of the nation to obtain a constitutional government, have partially broken down our indifference towards the inner life of the Russian people. Forgetting for the time being that menacing bogey, whose shadow, falling dark and sinister across our Indian frontier, is almost always present to our mind's eye, England's attention has been diverted from Russia as a rival in the East and riveted upon her internal struggles. Many have asked themselves, perhaps for the first time, what manner of soul and intellect animates that vast body of striving and aspiring humanity. Our interest, if not our fullest sympathy, has been awakened. We are not unwilling to fill up some of the gaps in our scanty knowledge of Russian psychology. But our curiosity as regards Russia is too often morbid, and our credulity as colossal

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as it is regrettable. Every individual crime, every unimportant disturbance that occurs upon the 8,660,000 square miles which form the area of the Russian Empire, seems to find a place in the papers ; while for wider and more accurate information we may often look in vain. There are some notable exceptions. To instance one which is distinctly beneficial : the series of articles contributed by Mr. Maurice Baring to the *Morning Post* must have given hundreds of English men and women entirely new views of Russian life. These articles are the more valuable and comprehensible to English people because they are based on the fair and intelligent observations of a fellow-countryman, and do not reach us—as is too often the case—through German or Jewish sources. But I have digressed from the field of poetry into that of journalistic progress.

It is impossible to converse with the Englishman of average culture without finding that he regards the intellectual development of Russia—provided he is at all willing to concede such a development—as a mushroom growth. His knowledge, which is almost certain to be restricted to one branch of literature, may possibly begin with the novels of Tourgeniev or Leo Tolstoi, and will stop short at Maxim Gorky. He will probably tell you that, interesting as he has found the masterpieces of Russian fiction up to a certain

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point, there is always something intangible and elusive in these pictures of the national life, even in the best of translations. Undoubtedly the life and culture of Russia are more remote from us than those of Italy or Germany ; but this is not the sole reason why the essential spirit of these novels eludes us. Few of us who open the translation of an Italian or German novel do so in complete ignorance of all the literary development which has preceded it. We may not have read the classics of these literatures, but we have almost unconsciously gathered some idea of the creative forces which have moulded and influenced them—of Dante, Boccaccio, Goldoni, Carducci; of Goethe, Schiller, Lessing, and Heine. With Russian literature it is otherwise. We almost invariably venture straight into that great school of realistic fiction, which forms as it were a middle period in the national literature, only to find ourselves constantly referred to phases of social and intellectual development to which we hold no clue. For this rich growth of Russian fiction was not spontaneous. As Professor Louis Léger has pointed out, it is very necessary to bear in mind that its evolution has been the result of successive generations.<sup>1</sup>

The poets of the early half of the nineteenth century were undoubtedly the pioneers of the

<sup>1</sup> *Russes et Slaves*, p. 21. Deuxième série. Hachette et Cie, Paris, 1896.

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intellectual progress which culminated in the novels of Tourgeniev, Dostoievsky, and Tolstoi. Ridiculed as they have been by critics of ultra-utilitarian views, despised by those who could not turn them to opportunist purposes, neglected at intervals by a public almost wholly absorbed in pressing questions of social reform—the Russian poets have kept alive that flame of pure idealism without which a country is desolate, even in the hour of political and commercial prosperity.

If it may be taken for granted that our languid interest in Russia has been recently fanned into an enthusiasm sufficiently fervid to carry us beyond the exclusive sphere of Russian fiction, then it may also be assumed that the publication of this book is a saner venture on the part of publisher and author than may appear at first sight.

With regard to the translations included in this volume, a word of explanation is necessary. To give at all a satisfactory idea of the works of these representative poets a far larger selection would have been necessary. Nothing short, in fact, of a carefully compiled anthology could have conveyed to my readers any adequate impression of the scope and beauty of their achievements. But the workers in this field are few, and, at the best, I could only have gleaned a small sheaf of acceptable English versions. Moreover, there

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was something incongruous in the idea of adding a considerable number of translations by other writers to a book which is not an anthology, but a volume of essays. I decided, therefore, to fall back on my own versions, with the frank confession that these are quite as representative of the translator's limitations as of the characteristic beauties of Russian poetry. This accounts for my failure to give any example from Poushkin's tragedy "Boris Godounov," any translation of Lermontov's "Lay of Tsar Ivan Vassilievich and the Merchant Kalashnikov," any pathetic pictures from Nekrassov's "Red-nosed Frost," and for many other omissions which I deplore. But these are the ill-chances of translation; for every one who has attempted this delicate feat of workmanship knows only too well that while a second-rate poem sometimes condescends to turn out a success, the perfect gem disdains to be reset by a hand less skilled and inspired than that of its originator.

I take this welcome opportunity of expressing my gratitude to Professor Morfill for his help and sympathy, extending over many years of study, and for his kind permission to include several of his translations in this volume. Of these "The Upas Tree" and "The Song of the Ploughman" appear in print for the first time.

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I also offer my sincere thanks to Miss Helena Frank, who has kindly allowed me to use her English versions of poems by Khomiakov, Nekrassov and Nadson.

FLORENCE, *April*, 1907.

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## ILLUSTRATIONS



# POETRY & PROGRESS IN RUSSIA

## THE PRECURSORS OF POUSHKIN

### I

THE predominance of poetry and of poetical influences in Russian literature is an indisputable fact. The very foundations of the modern literary school were laid by a poet. "Poushkin," says the dramatist Ostrovsky, "has not only given us *forms* of expression; he has furnished us with the actual formula of thought and emotion." In spite, however, of the primary importance of Poushkin and his art, Western Europe has paid far less attention to the great poets of Russia than to that group of realistic novelists whose works reflect in all directions the light which broke upon society and literature with the advent of Poushkin's novel in verse, *Eugene Onegin*. This neglect is due in a measure to difficulties of access and to the lack of adequate translations, but still more to the attitude of a whole school of Russian critics who made it their mission to decry

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the ideal, and cheapen the reputation, of their earlier poets. Since native critics have been content to dismiss Poushkin and Lermontov as "the idle singers of an empty day," whose works will not stand the touchstone of utilitarian criteria, it is not surprising that foreigners should have accepted this evaluation without suspicion or demur. Twice within the last twenty years special commemorative occasions have stirred the Russian public to a display of enthusiasm for Poushkin, and critics as generous-hearted as Gogol, and as far-sighted and intensely national as Dostoievsky, have never ceased to point to him as the first complete incarnation of the Russian spirit in literature. But, on the whole, the utilitarian tendency which for so many years hung like a blighting cloud above the horizon of Russian literature has done much to dim the glory of this great name.

I need only refer to these conflicts between the disciples of "art for art's sake" and those of "art for life," in so far as it is necessary to show how these rival æsthetic theories have helped or hindered the development of the particular schools of poetry from which I have selected representatives.

To the student who approaches Russian literature from the outside, knowing little of party strife and the disputes of the journalists, Poushkin is almost certain to appear as the centre of

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the Russian literary system, the orb round which all other bodies revolve. The need for some central point leads invariably to Poushkin, and this is a sufficient reason for giving him the most salient place in a book dealing, even in a fragmentary way, with the poetical aspects of Russian literature.

In writing of the earlier schools of poetry, the Romantic and the Popular (Narodny), I have adhered to the ready-made names of the textbooks, although it will be seen that these terms are capable only of a somewhat loose and indefinite application. Russian literature does not lend itself to precise classification. Enigmas and contradictions present themselves in all directions, offering difficulties to the rigid demarcation of periods, and the recognition of distinct schools of thought. The vast and complex country shows as intricate and paradoxical in its literary as in its physical, or political, aspect.

The garden of Russian literature possesses a rich soil, which will not, however, produce the same flowers through successive seasons. Individual blooms reach a sudden perfection, but by some freak of soil, or climate, nature does not seem "careful of the type." It passes, and the same spot which formerly charmed us with the roses and lilies of poetry now yields only the thorns of fractious criticism, or a dull crop of utilitarian literature. With such rapidity of flor-

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escence and decay it is difficult to distinguish clear groups in the flora of Russian literature. Leading characteristics become confused; the tendencies of particular periods overlap, and arbitrary distinctions are often misleading.

To take one instance only, certain authorities assert that Poushkin is the representative of an effete romanticism, and that Gogol inaugurated the new naturalistic era. Yet the moment we read and think for ourselves we discover the germs of naturalism to be actually present in Poushkin's *Eugene Onegin*; while we discern in Gogol's novels, side by side with his realistic tendencies, the glamour of that romanticism which his disciples repudiate in his name.

The absence, for a considerable period, of any systematic, philosophical criticism is undoubtedly the great obstacle to the acquirement of a complete *aperçu* of Russian literature. Bielinsky, the first great Russian critic, blindly venerated in his generation, and still in many respects an authority, pursued no definite method and left no solid historical basis for future criticism. He has given us instead a series of eloquent and sympathetic studies of nearly all the great Russian writers, his predecessors and contemporaries. Bielinsky writes with extraordinary charm of style and displays a delicate literary intuition. His devotion to art and literature is passionate and sincere, and a note of true pathos is audible in his voice

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when he pleads with the Russian public for a more generous appreciation of native genius. But his personal sympathies too often dim his critical vision. Always profoundly interesting, he is rarely convincing. Bielinsky is in many respects the Hazlitt of Russian criticism. He is at the mercy of his emotions, which fluctuate even more than those of Hazlitt. In the course of years Bielinsky changed his views more than once, and the close of his life found him engaged upon a fervent recantation of all that had once constituted his literary and philosophical creed. For many years the staunch upholder of idealism, maintaining the principle that the artist is responsible only to his loftiest inspiration, Bielinsky finally swung round with the new currents of thought which so powerfully affected all Russian society. At the close of his career he had so completely shifted his æsthetic standpoint that he no longer held it to be the mission of art to rise superior to the everyday needs and interests of humanity.

Bielinsky's apostasy heralded the coming of those utilitarian and democratic ideals which found their earliest exposition in the sincere, self-satisfied realism of Dobrolioubov and their most rabid utterance in the original, but warped, æsthetic teaching of Pissarev.

Perplexed by these marsh-lights of brilliant—but too often illogical—criticism, it is not surprising

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that to those interested in the subject the questions should arise : Does Russian literature consist only of a series of superb, but disorganised, efforts to express the spirit of the nation ? Is it only a maze of intricate ramifications leading back to no point of departure ? Has there been no continuous literary development carried out under traditions which have a definite origin ? The answers to such questions depend upon our convictions as regards Poushkin. Is he, or is he not, a central point to which are focussed the brightest rays of Russian sentiment and intellect ?

### II

During the eighteenth century, poetry existed in Russia chiefly as a medium of pompous or elegant panegyric. Trediakovsky (1703-69), to whom belongs the credit of a first attempt to fix the principles of Russian versification, left two important treatises, one on Rhetoric, the other on Poetry, many occasional poems and a lengthy composition in hexameters, "The Telemachide"—a translation of Fénélon's celebrated work. But his chief service to Russian literature consisted in his efforts to replace the syllabic by the tonic verse. Alternately caressed and humiliated —on one occasion, at least, actually beaten by order of his imperial mistress—Trediakovsky's position at the Court of the Empress Anne was

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little better than that of the dwarfs and fools at the mediæval courts of Western Europe. For the last fourteen years of his life he held a professorship at the Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg, but died universally disliked and despised by his colleagues on account of his servile disposition ; which, however, remembering the episode of the cudgels, seems to call for some leniency of judgment.

Although Trediakovsky was the first to pay attention to the laws of Russian versification, Bielinsky regards Lomonossov (1712-65) as the first Russian poet worthy of the name. The odes of Lomonossov are still mere rhetorical effusions, pale copies of Corneille and Racine, but they display a spark of talent, and that saving eloquence which raises them above the work of his contemporary, Soumarokov, and his immediate successors of the pseudo-classical school, Kheraskov, Bogdanovich, Kapnist, and Khemnitzer. Soumarokov (1718-77) rendered some service to the Russian stage. He also left an innumerable quantity of verses, including eighty odes and seventy-six eclogues ; and, in one of his works, a couple of lines of prose worth the sum total of his poetic inanities : "Every human being is a man, and the only difference between men is that which is created by their mental capacities." This is an enlightened sentiment for a Russian in the middle of the eighteenth century,

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and we are conscious of a great advance upon the crouching humility of a Trediakovsky.

Kheraskov (1733-1807) was one of the first disciples of Freemasonry in Russia. He was the author of a monumental work entitled *The Russiad*, which earned for him the pompous title of the "Russian Homer." His style was correct, but colourless; nevertheless, he was greatly honoured by his contemporaries, and his influence, according to Bielinsky, lasted until the appearance of Poushkin.

Bogdanovich (1728-78) is best known by his mythological poem *Psyche* ("Doushenka"), the idea of which he borrowed from La Fontaine's "Psyché et Cupidon." This poem seems to have enjoyed extraordinary popularity. Karamzin, who doubtless expressed the opinion of the day, says: "Where is the Russian who has not read 'Doushenka'? It displays the power of a blithe and joyous fancy, governed by good taste. It is sportive, excursive, ingenuous, true." Sir John Bowring, who gives some extracts from this work in his *Russian Anthology*, speaks of it as "a graceful and lovely poem." A more modern writer, K. Waliszewski, in his *History of Russian Literature*,<sup>1</sup> says that Bogdanovich has introduced into the work episodes of a

<sup>1</sup> M. Waliszewski is often a censorious critic of a literature for which he has so little sympathy that there seems no reason for his having constituted himself its historian.

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“revolting cynicism,” and depicted his Psyche “as a vulgar and depraved coquette.” The average reader will not be captivated by the literary grace, or shocked by the obscenity of “Doushenka.” He will only mildly wonder that this fluent, but insipid, allegory should have called forth such expressions of extravagant praise or censure.

Passing over Von Vizin, whose remarkable gifts were exercised almost exclusively in the sphere of dramatic literature, Derjavin is the next link in our chain of poetry. The descendant of an old Tatar family, in early life Derjavin entered the army, from which he was afterwards transferred to the civil service. In 1782 he won the favour of Catharine II by his poem “Felitsa,” in which he sang the praises of the Empress, and reflected to some extent the sentiments and characteristics of her reign. An artist by temperament, he invested the conventional verse of the day with a freshness and charm unknown to Lomonossov or Bogdanovich. His Anacreontic odes have been compared for plastic beauty and graceful imagery to some of the gems of the Greek Anthology. Bielinsky, speaking of the musical quality of Derjavin’s verse, likens its depth and sonority to the voice of a Russian priest at celebration. In this poet traces of national sentiment are clearly discernible; slight, indeed, but sufficient to make us realise, almost

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for the first time, that we are in contact with a Russian mind.

The historian Karamzin (1766–1826), although not strictly speaking a poet, exercised so profound an influence upon every branch of letters that he cannot be omitted from my scheme. He may be said to have inaugurated an entirely new period in Russian literature. Hitherto the character of its prose had been as conventional and pedantic as that of its poetry was premeditated, rhetorical, and deficient in true pathos. Karamzin substituted for the stilted language of the schools the living language not of the nation, but at least of society. Before his day, none ventured to write as they felt, still less as they spoke. Karamzin, in electing to express himself with greater simplicity, incidentally brought about a great reformation in his native tongue. His *Letters of a Russian Traveller*, published in 1791, on his return from a tour in Western Europe, was the first book to attract the Russian public by the novel charm of a popular style. From his sojourn in France, Karamzin brought back the sentimental tendencies of Rousseau and his followers. The most conspicuous feature of his novels, *Nathalia: the Boyar's Daughter*, and *Poor Lisa*, is a feminine sensibility carried to morbid excess. Nevertheless these books awoke the interest of society and created—for the first time in Russia—a genuine reading public.

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Karamzin partially freed the Russian language from the bondage of classical convention ; but its full emancipation only came with Poushkin. For nearly a quarter of a century the historian exercised a kind of autocracy in the realm of Russian letters. But his long popularity had its term, and gradually his works—including the *History of the Russian Empire*, on which the remnant of his fame now rests—failed to satisfy the needs of a people whose growth was so rapid. Without Karamzin, however, it might have been long before Russian became the vigorous, expressive, supple language out of which Poushkin moulded his exquisite verse.

Karamzin's example was followed in the sphere of poetry by Dmitriev and Ozerov and a few other poetasters of the "sentimental school" ; but the fabulist Krylov (1763–1844) is the sole predecessor of Poushkin upon whom time has conferred immortality. His style grew out of the natural diction of Karamzin, and was popular in the best sense of the word. Krylov's fables are as full of vitality as when they first appeared, nearly a century ago. His powers of observation were far keener than those of the historian, and his work has a strong flavour of nationality. A man of wide culture and chequered experience, Krylov's humour has a sharper edge than that of La Fontaine.

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## III

To the period of Karamzin's influence succeeded the Romantic movement. Before giving some account of the leading representatives of this tendency, it will be advisable to consider its general characteristics and to show in what way the romanticism of Russia differed from that of other countries.

Romanticism found its way into Russia through the medium of Joukovsky's translations, particularly from the English and German poets of the time. Before long, however, it adapted itself to the national character and assumed peculiar qualities of its own which distinguish it from the romanticism of France and Germany, and—less sharply—from that of England, as exemplified in Byron. Thus the essential difference between the romanticism of Russia and that of Western Europe lies in the fact that in the first instance it was a reflected light from other lands, whereas in Europe it was the revival of a bygone spirit. Consequently it coloured the imagination of Russian writers, but did not mould their ideas. "Russian romanticism," to quote Golovin, "differs from that of the West, because it does not owe its origin to a return to the Middle Ages. . . . Chivalry and Catholicism, all the poetic decorations of that period, were too little in harmony with the Russian spirit to prove attractive to our

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poets." Poushkin merely dallied with the kind of romantic themes then in vogue in Western Europe. As soon as he found his individuality, he dropped the paraphernalia of ultra-romanticism for more national subjects and more realistic methods. Lermontov, who was far more under the spell of romanticism than Poushkin, understood it in a totally different spirit to Bürger or Joukovsky. His *Lay of Tsar Ivan Vassilievich*, the young *Oprichnik*, and the bold *Merchant Kalashnikov* was his most successful attempt to revive the atmosphere and colour of mediæval Russia. But the historic past has never proved so strong an influence in Russian art and literature as the actuality of the neighbouring East. In the Caucasus, with its glorious scenery and romantic life, the Russian poets, painters, and musicians have always possessed a source of inspiration close at hand. Instead of purely fantastic heroes, such as the Laras and Conrads of Byron's poetry, or the Carl Moor of Schiller's "Robbers," they depicted the contemporary mountain chiefs of Georgia, and, more rarely, the Muscovite warriors of the sixteenth century in their grim and unalluring actuality. Thus their works, even from the first dawn of the romantic movement, are far more concrete and real than those of the German romanticists.

Into the heavy atmosphere compounded of pseudo-classic convention and strained sentimen-

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tality, which prevailed at the close of Karamzin's period, Joukovsky's early poems come like a revivifying breeze, stirring the dormant fancy and enthusiasm of society. Not that Joukovsky was entirely emancipated from the all-pervading influence of Karamzin; but he imported into his literary work the new elements he had discovered for himself in the romantic ballads of Schiller and Bürger. Bielinsky, who values Joukovsky's services to Russian literature more highly than many of the later critics, calls him the "Russian Columbus," who discovered for his fellow-countrymen literary treasures the existence of which they did not even suspect.

The story of Joukovsky is a romance in itself. Born in 1783, in the Government of Toula, he was the natural son of a rich landowner named Bounin. His mother, a beautiful Turkish girl, had been captured by Bounin's serfs at the sacking of Bender, and brought back to Russia as a gift for their master. The child of this union was adopted by an intimate friend of Bounin's, a poor proprietor living in the neighbourhood, who bestowed upon him his own name of Joukovsky. In 1771 the Bounins had lost their only surviving son, a student at the University of Leipzig. Madame Bounin, who appears to have been a woman of complacent temperament, adopted the child of the Turkish favourite in memory of her own son, and brought him up in his father's

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household. Before his death, Bounin solemnly commended the boy to his wife and daughters, who faithfully fulfilled his desires, sharing even their inheritance with the illegitimate child. Joukovsky was worshipped by these five women, and ran every risk of being spoilt in childhood. At fourteen he was placed in the boarding-house reserved for the sons of the aristocracy at the Moscow University. His intellectual progress was remarkably rapid, and he soon began to write verses of a dreamy, elegiac character. This monotony of mood clung to him throughout his career, narrowing his influence and keeping him aloof from the broader interests of life. The circumstances of his birth may have done something to foster this spirit of melancholy; but in Joukovsky the mood often strikes us as partly factitious.

One of Joukovsky's earliest essays in verse was a translation of Gray's "Elegy." Being anxious to earn his livelihood, he laid aside poetry for a time and undertook the translation of a few popular novels of the day and the whole of Kotzebue's plays. After leaving the University he became intimate with Karamzin, who had then retired from active journalism, and was devoting himself exclusively to the completion of his *History of Russia*.

In 1808 Joukovsky settled in Moscow as co-editor with Katschenovsky of the *European*

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*Journal.* A number of his translations from Goethe, Schiller, and other poets appeared in this publication. A partially original work, the ballad *Lioudmilla*, created a great sensation by its novelty of form and subject, and Joukovsky soon found a swarm of inferior imitators in the sphere of romantic ballad.

In 1810 the poet retired to a country house, purchased with his share of his father's fortune. Here he lived a quiet existence, writing only when in the mood for work, and nursing that spirit of subjective, self-centred melancholy, in which he wrapped himself as in some tragic and funereal cloak. The best of the poems completed in this retirement was the ballad *Sviatlana* published about 1811.

In 1814, immediately after the occupation of Paris by the Allies, Joukovsky was moved by patriotic sentiment to write a poem addressed to the Emperor Alexander I. It was a moment of intense patriotic fervour, and Joukovsky's effusion touched the heart of the nation, still quivering from the sufferings of "the terrible year." Not the Court only, but the whole country acclaimed the poet who had given utterance to the feeling of the time. Henceforward a different, and not altogether congenial, career was forced upon Joukovsky's acceptance. The following year he received an appointment in the household of the Empress Dowager, with an emolument of four

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thousand roubles a year. He was then but thirty-two, and he realised with regret that the poetry of his life was over and the prose had begun. He remained at Court for twenty-five years ; first as Professor of Russian to the Empress Alexandra Feodorovna, and subsequently as tutor to the Grand Duke, afterwards Alexander II. In this capacity—although debarred from continuous literary work—we may assume that he rendered the greatest of all his services to his country. Joukovsky was essentially the disciple of Schiller—the poet of humanity and the champion of generous sympathies ; therefore he cannot have failed to exercise a good influence upon his pupil, destined to become the emancipator of the serfs and the most liberal of the Russian autocrats. It is more than probable that it was in the role of tutor, rather than in that of the “Russian Columbus” of literature, that Joukovsky aided most in the progress and welfare of his fellow-countrymen.

At the age of sixty Joukovsky retired from his arduous service at Court and went to live in Germany. Unfortunately his marriage with a woman much younger than himself brought no comfort to his declining years. He gave himself up to mystical speculation, and the melancholy of his earlier days returned in a more aggravated form. He found sufficient energy to complete two literary projects : a translation of “The

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*Odyssey*" and an episode from Firdusi's "Rustum and Zorab"; but his influence waned as his pietism increased. He died at Baden-Baden in 1852.

Joukovsky had an actual genius for translation. His method was not so much that of conscientious and laborious tracing from the original work, as a complete assimilation and reconstruction of it in the spirit of his native language. So extensive was his range of foreign literatures that it is sometimes difficult to decide the origin of some of his poems. *The Golden Harp* is an example in which it is by no means easy to say what is Joukovsky's, or what may be borrowed from other sources—probably Scandinavian. In any case, it is a typical and beautiful example of his romantic feeling; that vague, mystic romanticism which is essentially of the North. Intensely subjective, Joukovsky is only successful with such subjects as appeal to his temperament. When in full sympathy with a theme he not unfrequently raises the translation above the level of the original. This is the case in his version of Scott's "Smaylho'me Tower" ("The Eve of St. John"), in which he displays an energy of diction and a lyric swing far surpassing anything Scott has attained in this particular ballad. Among Joukovsky's finest original ballads we must include *Russlan and Lioudmilla*, *Vadim*, and *Sviatlana*; among his translations, Schiller's *Count Hapsburg*, *Ritter Toggenburg*, and *Cas-*

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*sandra.* His translations of Moore and Byron are not so happy, with the exception of "The Prisoner of Chillon," of which Bielinsky says that it is a wonderful revelation of the capacities of the Russian language for passion and vitality of expression.

Apart from his favourite ballad form, Joukovsky wrote a few beautiful lyrics: "The Morning Star," "The Floweret," "Summer Evening," and "Consolation." His patriotic poems are, generally speaking, his weakest efforts, because, as we have seen, nationality was hardly compatible with the spirit of mediæval romanticism, and Joukovsky's Russian legends—strive as he may to give them a glaze of national colour—might as well have been written by Bürger or Uhland. Few of his poems, however, are deficient in grace and intimate feeling. Even his metrical epistles—that dry form which was still in vogue in his day—contain gleams of colour and touches of sincere emotion.

Russian society outgrew its enthusiasm for Joukovsky's poetry as we outgrew our taste for the lyrics of Thomas Moore; yet it was to its own generation a healthy reaction from a surfeit of pseudo-classicism. Nor would it be just to dismiss this poet as a mere echo of the Western romanticists. Had he been only the gifted translator who brought home the genius of Schiller and Byron to his fellow-countrymen, his service

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would indeed have been worthy of their gratitude. But he was something more than this. He actually transfused into the dried-up veins of the national literature the warmth and vitality which throbbed at the heart of the Romantic movement.

### IV

Contemporary with Joukovsky were one or two poets worthy of mention, although they can hardly be described as literary or social pioneers.

Ivan Kozlov (1779-1840) represents the ultra-romantic tendency in Russian poetry. His inspiration is not of the highest order, but his sense of form and fine ear for musical cadence make his verses pleasant reading. His principal works are *The Monk* and an epic poem, *Nathalia Dolgorouka*. *The Wreck* is a fair sample of his lyric style, and finds a place in many popular anthologies. He translated many of Byron's poems, but had scarcely sufficient spirit for the task.

A far more interesting personality was Batiushkov (1787-1855), who had a fine technique, and perhaps greater intellectual vigour than Joukovsky. His brief career and the limitation of his sympathies debarred him from exercising a wide social influence.

The poems of Joukovsky and Batiushkov

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present the sharpest contrast. The former drew his inspiration from mediæval romanticism, the latter from the antique. Batioushkov was as much attracted by clearness of thought and correctness of expression as Joukovsky by visionary ideas and vague melancholy. Like Keats, Batioushkov was one of the rare instances of a mind impregnated by the Hellenic spirit without having come into direct contact with the Greek classics. He was a good Latin scholar, but, save through Schiller, knew nothing of Greece; yet it is difficult to believe that his beautiful examples from the Greek Anthology—some twenty in number—were actually translated from French sources. In his choice of subjects he makes a somewhat ostentatious display of his classical tastes. He cares nothing for mysticism, nor for what Scott called the “gramarye” of the romantic renaissance. He finds his best inspiration in paganism, and his treatment of mythological subjects is elegant and sculptural. But it is sculpture carried out in tinted marbles; for Batioushkov by no means lacks passion or colour of a clear, transparent kind. If, being a child of his age, he did not entirely escape from the prevailing influence of the hour, it was to the Greek romanticism he inclined at such rare moments; never to the glamour and mystery of German ballad writers. His sensuousness, his avowed paganism, clearness of vision,

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and direct expression give to his poems a concrete quality the very opposite of Joukovsky's vague emotionalism.

Dobrolioubov considers Batioushkov a realist *manqué*. "Batioushkov," he says, "loved real life, like the Epicurean that he was, but feared to walk directly in its ways, and saw that our efforts to create a golden age out of everyday existence could never be of any avail." He elected, therefore—by way of compromise—to depict life according to antique tradition, rather than face the truth and evolve a way of his own.

Batioushkov's life was overshadowed by the fear of inherited madness, and his actual working years were short. The son of an aristocratic family, he received an excellent education, and at nineteen accepted the post of secretary to his uncle, Count Mouraviev, the Assistant Minister of Instruction. The position was a sinecure, and Batioushkov was free to devote most of his time to literary pursuits. In 1807 he joined the army then in the field against France, and was severely wounded at the battle of Heilsberg. The following year he took part in the Finnish campaign against the Aland Islands, after which he retired from the service and settled for a time in Moscow. During this period he was a frequent contributor to Joukovsky's periodical the *European Journal*. In 1810 he received an appointment in the Imperial Library, but the memorable year 1812 saw him

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back with the colours. He served through the entire campaign, and entered Paris with the allies. Shortly after his return to Russia he fell into bad health, and a long stay in Italy failed to relieve his increasing weakness and depression.

Batiushkov's career came to a premature and tragic conclusion. In 1822, at the early age of thirty-five, his brain entirely gave way; yet for another thirty-three years he lived on in the darkness of hopeless insanity, confined to his estate in the Government of Vologda.

Like Landor—with whom he has several points in common—Batiushkov was essentially the poet of the connoisseurs rather than of the million. He outlived the interest which his single volume of poetry inspired; but his voice speaks clearly from the polished and plastic verse of Poushkin. Batiushkov created a standard of technical perfection that surpassed anything previously attained in Russian poetry.

VERSES BY JOUKOVSKY, KRYLOV,  
BARATINSKY, AND KOZLOV

JOUKOVSKY

TO A FLOWERET

Floweret, faded and forsaken,  
Fragile beauty of the lea,  
Autumn's cruel hand hath taken  
All thy summer charms from thee.

Heigho ! that the years must bring  
This same destiny to all ;  
One by one our joys take wing,  
One by one your petals fall.

So each evening rings the knell  
Of some dream or rapture perished,  
And the fleeting hours dispel  
Each some vision fondly cherished.

Life's illusions lie unmasked,  
And the star of hope burns paler.  
Has not some sage long since asked :  
Men or blossoms—which are frailer ?

*Rosa Newmarch.*

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### THE APPROACH OF SPRING

The skies are calm. Uncertain,  
Behind a misty curtain,  
The moon is shining still.  
Above the dusky hill  
The star of love is bright.  
Without or forms or faces,  
The blue, unsounded spaces,  
The stillness of the night,  
Sweet spirits animate—  
For Spring is at the gate!

*H. C. F.*

### KRYLOV

#### THE QUARTET

A grinning ape, an ass of stubborn air,  
A long-horned goat, a bow-legged, grizzly bear,  
Met one fine day, and soon their minds were set  
To end the party with a fine quartet.  
They have a viola, two violins,  
A 'cello too, and music up to date,  
For hall, the shady turf where crowds await,  
In gaping wonder, till the treat begins.  
Quick flash the bows! Each scrapes with right  
good will.  
But all that's heard are noises, loud and shrill.  
The monkey, quite put out, exclaims at last:  
"One moment, pause, I pray you, not so fast.  
Our concert, friends, was certain to sound queer,

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Placed as we are. You, viola, come here ;  
While opposite the 'cello takes his place.  
Then I, who of our quartet take the lead,  
Will have my worthy second face to face.  
Our efforts now are certain to succeed.  
Charmed by our music, presently  
The woods and hills will skip with glee."

Then each one goes to his appointed seat  
And strives in vain the quartet to repeat.  
"Stop!" cries the ass, "come, cease this horrid  
din !  
See, *I* have found the right way to proceed,  
And then our concert will run smooth indeed.  
Let's sit in one long line and then begin."  
Obedient to the ass, the players then  
Sat in a row and started once again.  
But not one player on the right note hits.  
"What can be done to find the proper key ?  
How shall we sit ? What can the matter be ?"  
They shout and wrangle till they lose their wits.

Just then a nightingale came flying by  
And paused, attracted by this hue and cry.  
Round her they crowd, vociferous as ever,  
And beg for her professional advice.  
"For pity's sake, we know you are so clever,  
To put us straight a moment would suffice.  
We have the instruments, the music too,  
But give us just one hint what we should do."

## The Precursors of Poushkin

“ If to be true musicians you aspire,”  
Replied the critic, “ each must be possest  
Of gifts with which coarse natures are not blest :  
Pure taste, great skill, warmth of poetic fire,  
Besides a delicate and subtle ear.  
If in such qualities true art consists,  
Not one of you, my worthy friends, I fear,  
No matter if his seat be here or there,  
Will find his name inscribed upon Art’s lists,  
Or e’er may hope an artist’s crown to wear.”

*Rosa Newmarch.*

## BARATINSKY

Be mirthful now, for nothing stays,  
Our good and evil both are brief.  
Capricious Fate leads many ways,  
Sometimes to joy, sometimes to grief,  
And is no friend to constancy.  
Listen, you whose lives are bright,  
For the uncertain hours be  
Winged for flight.

Do not repine, since nothing stays ;  
What matter if it chance at last  
That unexpectedly our days  
By cruel sorrow are o’ercast ?  
Upon this changeful earth of ours,  
The gods from pain took half its stings  
When alike to all the hours

They gave wings.

*Rosa Newmarch.*

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## KOZLOV

### THE WRECK

Day in a purple flush had died,  
And I, with bitter thoughts at heart,  
Lulled by the murmur of the tide,  
Upon the sea-shore walked apart.

There lay, bereft of mast and sail,  
A shattered ship, half sunk in sand,  
That seething waves in some past gale  
Had cast upon this lonely strand.

Long since, the moistening dews and showers  
Had sealed with moss each starting plank,  
And in the crevices grew flowers,  
With knots of sea-grass, pale and rank.

Storm-driven on this rock-girt coast,  
From whence—and whither bound was she ?  
In that wild hour when she was lost  
Who shared her hopeless destiny ?

The silent depths, the silent waves,  
The secret of their doom withhold ;  
Only the evening sunlight mocks  
Th' abandoned hulk with gleams of gold.

The fisher's wife sits on the prow,  
With eyes that search the distant seas ;  
She waits and watches, singing low  
A song which mingles with the breeze ;

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And close to her a little boy,  
With tangled locks of flaxen hair,  
Laughs loud, and leaps the waves for joy,  
His curls all ruffled by the air.

He plucks the tender blooms that grow  
Where the sparse tufts of sea-grass wave.  
Dear happy child, how should he know  
His flowers are gathered from a grave !

*Rosa Newmarch.*

## THE ROMANTIC POETS

### POUSHKIN

#### I

**R**USSIAN society was now expectant of some consummate manifestation of national genius. Lomonossov had awakened the intellect of the country and provided it with a literary language ; dignified, correct, based on the classical traditions of the eighteenth century—the language of the panegyrical ode and the metrical epistle. Karamzin had touched a frigid, artificial age by a sentimentalism that was, however, only partly sincere. But, as Bielinsky observed, tears—even factitious—marked an advance in the evolution of Russian society. Krylov had taught society to laugh, as Karamzin taught it to weep, but more naturally. He held up a mirror in which, for the first time, the nation saw itself reflected as it actually was. Not, indeed, with perfect fidelity, for the mirror of the satirist, pure and simple, generally distorts something ; but Krylov's fables remain the first imperfect revelation of nationality in Russian

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literature. Joukovsky stirred both the heart and the imagination of the reader. The Russians now drank at the haunted well of romanticism ; saw strange visions and were thrilled by new sensations. Joukovsky's unsubstantial, dreamy poetry had not sufficient stamina to form a new epoch, but through its agency society realised not only the movements of the outer world, but its own emotional capacities. By these various paths we have now reached that converging point at which we are confronted with a figure, greater than any we have yet considered, who seems to close the gates finally upon the old "preparatory period" of Russian literature and to point to a new road, leading on to nationality and independent creation.

Alexander Sergeivich Poushkin was born at Moscow on May 26th, 1799. His father—the poet was proud to remember—was the descendant of an old, although not a titled, family. A man of many accomplishments, he took a lively interest in the various literary movements of his day, and was inclined to the Voltairean philosophy. The poet's uncle, Vassily Lvovich, was even better known in the fashionable and cultured world, as a member of that famous literary society, the "Arzamas," and as the writer of smooth and flowing verses, from which Poushkin learnt much of his technical skill. The brothers Serge and Vassily Poushkin were representative

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types of the absentee aristocracy in Russia at the close of the eighteenth century : easy-going, hospitable, and highly, if somewhat superficially, cultured. Country life to them and their like meant intolerable boredom ; nor did they trouble to inquire into the condition of their property so long as it yielded the wherewithal to support them in a kind of dilapidated splendour in Moscow. Their town house, with its superb furniture and rich hangings in one room, its bare walls and rush-seated chairs in another, was highly characteristic of the manner of living among the poorer Russian aristocracy, then, and at a much later date.

On the maternal side Poushkin's descent was less impeccable, although he did his best to set his maternal grandfather in a picturesque and romantic light. The poet's mother was the granddaughter of Ibrahim Hannibal, a negro sent to Peter the Great—an amateur of all such "curiosities"—by the Russian ambassador at Constantinople. Hannibal's boyhood was spent at Court, and afterwards he was sent to Paris, although not under such luxurious circumstances as Poushkin depicts in his *Memoirs* of his ancestor, whom he euphemistically describes as "Peter the Great's Arab." The physiognomy of the poet himself, the thick lips, crisp, curly hair, and the nose which broadens and flattens across the nostrils, all point to an admixture of pure *negro*, rather than of

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*Arab* blood. In spite of a veneer of education, Hannibal appears to have retained a good deal of the savage in his nature. The poet's grandfather, Ossip Hannibal, was also a man of violent temper and unbridled passions, and Poushkin himself was sensible of what in moments of cynical frankness he calls "the inherited taint of negro concupiscence." His grandmother, whose brief, unhappy married life came to an end in 1784, when Ossip Hannibal was tried and found guilty of bigamy, was a woman of character, who exercised considerable influence on the poet's early years.

Until seven years of age Poushkin showed no signs of intellectual superiority. On the contrary, he was so unnaturally dull and heavy that he gave his parents serious cause for anxiety. The shy, unattractive child was neglected by his mother in favour of his sister Olga and his younger brother Leo. The sole friends of his early childhood were his grandmother and his nurse, Arina Rodionova. The latter, a typical specimen of the old-fashioned, devoted family servant, had the whole world of Russian folk-lore at her finger-ends, and from her Poushkin first acquired his intimate knowledge of the national songs and legends. His grandmother also stirred his historical interest by relating her reminiscences of the splendour of Court life under the great Empress Catharine II. After he had passed his

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seventh year, Poushkin's entire constitution underwent an almost miraculous change. He lost his heavy gait and stolid air, becoming active and sprightly. His father now began to interest himself in the boy's education, and several foreign teachers were engaged for him. By the time he was nine he had already evinced that passionate enthusiasm for literature which never waned at any moment of his career. Skabichevsky, speaking of this period of Poushkin's life, says: "Private theatricals and *jeux d'esprit* of all kinds were constantly going on at home, and the children were allowed to take part in them. It is not surprising that before he was twelve Poushkin made his first attempts at writing verses." These verses were in the style of La Fontaine or Voltaire, and his little plays were borrowed from Molière, for French was the language in which he thought and wrote in his childhood.

Poushkin's parents, who had felt such anxiety as to his sluggish temperament, were now equally alarmed at "the spirit of unresting flame" which seemed to possess him. He threatened to become unmanageable on account of his quick temper and exuberant vitality, therefore it was decided to send him to school. In August, 1811, Poushkin entered the Lycée for the sons of the nobility, at Tsarsky Selo.

Like many another poet, Poushkin proved an

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unsatisfactory scholar. The director of the Lycée prophesied a poor future for the youth who neglected his legitimate studies for desultory reading in the school library, and wasted valuable hours in editing the school magazine. His earliest published verses appeared in the *Europy Vestnik* in 1814, over the signature "Alexander N. K." ; and the following year his full name was revealed to the literary world. In January, 1815, a public examination took place at the school, to which many important officials were invited. Among the visitors was Derjavin. The old poet's attention was attracted to Poushkin when the latter came forward to recite his own verses, "Reminiscences of Tsarsky Selo." He carried back to Petersburg a lively impression of the youth's genius and a copy of the verses he had recited. From that moment Poushkin's name became known to the chief literary men of the day. Joukovsky, then at the zenith of his popularity, conceived the highest hopes of Poushkin's future ; and such was his belief in the lad's innate genius that he did not hesitate to submit his own poetry to this critic of sixteen. Henceforward Joukovsky showed a paternal affection and solicitude for Poushkin, who, in his turn, used to call the older man his "guardian angel." The following year Karamzin settled for a time at Tsarsky Selo, and renewed his acquaintance with Poushkin, whom he had seen as a child at his

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father's house in Moscow. Their relations became intimate, and chapter after chapter of the famous *History* was read aloud to Poushkin by the author. Encouraged by the appreciation of such authorities, the young man devoted himself almost entirely to the development of his poetic gift. At school he wrote about two hundred lyrics and epigrams, and the sketch of a longer poem, "Russlan and Lioudmilla."

Poushkin left school in 1817, and shortly afterwards entered a regiment of foot guards. Henceforth he embarked upon that strange dual existence which gives to his career an air of inconsistency, and makes many of his actions and opinions so difficult to interpret. He possessed a fine physique; was a keen sportsman, an excellent athlete, an accomplished horseman, and one of the best pupils of the famous fencing-master Belville. He had, in fact, all the qualities which contributed to make him popular in the fashionable military set in which he was now launched. The unsavoury chronicle of intrigues, duels, and excesses of all kinds in which he indulged at this period of his life has probably lost nothing in transmission. It is doubtful whether Poushkin or Byron were as black as they painted themselves and so induced others to paint them. Poushkin undoubtedly maintained a lofty and almost sacerdotal conception of the poet's mission, and would break away suddenly from his unwhole-

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some surroundings at some secret prompting of his inspiration. Like Dagonet, he "wallowed, then he washed"; after which he would soar on wings apparently unsoled to the rarefied atmosphere of the sublime.

The dualism of his moral life is equally apparent in his attitude towards social and political questions. He was a welcome member of the "Arzamas," a society formed in support of such moderate literary and social reformers as Karamzin and Joukovsky, in opposition to the "Shishkovists," or blind adherents of past tradition. The period was marked by a craze for societies of every kind, open or secret, political, literary, masonic, or bacchanalian. In the last category we may place "the Society of the Green Lamp," to which Poushkin and some of his brother officers belonged. But there were also other societies likely to prove still more dangerous to a hot-headed youth at the outset of his career. Such were the political unions, in which he imbibed ideas by no means in accordance with the liberal-conservativism of Joukovsky or Karamzin. The leading members of such secret organisations were Mouraviev, the two Ryleievs, Bestoujiev-Riumin, Pestel, and others; almost all involved in the unfortunate plot of December, 1825, and destined to end their days on the gallows or in Siberia.

It is not clear how far Poushkin was implicated

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in the doings of these secret societies. It is evident that for a time, at least, he was in sympathy with their designs and desired to take an active share in the liberal movement. His susceptible nature could not remain unaffected at a moment when "free thoughts like lightnings were alive" and running through all society. Perhaps it was fortunate for him that his aristocratic environment and a reputation for frivolity procured for him only a lukewarm reception among the conspirators. Partly from a real, but transient, enthusiasm, and partly for the sake of excitement and notoriety, he put his gifts at the service of the liberal cause. A number of his satirical verses were soon circulated in private, which increased his popularity, but placed him in a dangerous position with the Government. Two or three warnings and reprimands not having sufficed to teach Poushkin prudence, complaints of his conduct at length reached the ears of Alexander I, who threatened to send him to Siberia. Poushkin, now seriously alarmed, entreated Karamzin to intervene on his behalf. The historian promised, on condition that the young man ceased his attacks upon the higher powers. But even Karamzin's influence could not entirely avert punishment. Poushkin was not sent to Siberia, but transferred from the Guards to serve on a council of administration in the southern provinces of Russia.

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The penalty exacted for his youthful indiscretions was not very severe, and actually proved a blessing in disguise. But although sustained by the consciousness of the martyr's role, and the knowledge that his friends at Court would do their best to shorten the period of his disgrace, Poushkin seems to have taken his exile in a bitter and resentful spirit.

No sooner had he arrived at Yekaterinoslav than he was laid up with a severe attack of fever. General Raevsky, the father of one of Poushkin's school friends, chanced to be passing through the town on his way to take over a command in the Caucasus. Pitying the young man in his sickness and solitude, Raevsky obtained leave to take him up to the hills. The time which Poushkin spent with the Raevsky family was one of the happiest and most stimulating in his career.

The grandeur of the Caucasian scenery stirred his imagination and gave a new direction to his thoughts. At this time, too, he first became acquainted with Byron's poetry. During this visit, and later on, while staying with the Raevskys at their estate at Kamenka, he found himself in a circle of enthusiastic Byron worshippers. The circumstances of his own life at the time, his sense of rebellion against society, his resentful misanthropy, all contributed to make him fall an easy victim to the Byronic fascination. The

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Polish poet, Mickiewicz, describes this influence in picturesque, if somewhat exaggerated, terms. "Poushkin," he says, "fell into Byron's sphere of attraction, and revolved round this orb like a planet lighted by its rays. In the works of this period all is Byronic—the subjects, characters, ideas, and forms." But Mickiewicz does not regard Poushkin as a mere imitator of the English poet; he considers him not so much a *Byronist* as a *Byroniac*—possessed by the spirit of Byron. Later on I shall endeavour to show the extent and intensity of Byron's influence upon Poushkin's works; for the present I am only concerned with its immediate effect upon his manner of life. The side of Byron which appealed most directly to Poushkin and to his generation was not so much his pessimism as his contempt for social observances; his rebellion against traditional and prescribed morality and his haughty individualism. Pypin thinks this side of Byronism was really of service to Russian society, since "it raised the tone of the *intelligentsia*<sup>1</sup> and taught a man to be the master of his own individuality. Poushkin and his friends seemed as anti-Christ to the hypocrites of their day; not because they upheld in their writings any special political or philosophical ideas, but because of their whole mode of existence: their fantastic style of dress, the

<sup>1</sup> A Russian word signifying the cultured classes of society.

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occasions they gave for scandal, and their passion for duelling."

From Kamenka, Poushkin was recalled to accompany his chief to Kishiniev,<sup>1</sup> in Bessarabia, where a picturesque and motley population, Greek, Moldavian, Turkish, and Italian, offered material which was not lost upon his artistic perception.

Here he reverted to the disorderly life which had so nearly proved his ruin in St. Petersburg. Poushkin's intrigues and duels became the talk of the town. In the autumn of 1822, having been engaged overnight in an unusually fierce quarrel at the card tables, he was ordered by his long-suffering chief to repair to the neighbouring town of Ismail until the scandal had blown over. On the road Poushkin fell in with a band of gipsies and joined them for a time in their wandering life. The outcome of this episode was his poem *The Gipsies*, with its misanthropical hero, Aleko—the type of social exile Poushkin would naturally create at the height of his Byronic infatuation. From Kishiniev he was transferred to Odessa, where he found himself under Verontsiev, a far more exacting chief, who treated him merely as an official and made no allowances for the aberrations of genius. At Odessa Poushkin fell under the influence of an Englishman who seems to have been a disciple of Shelley. Having

<sup>1</sup> The scene of the recent disturbances between Jews and Russians.

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imbibed the principles of “the only intellectual atheist I ever met,” he wrote to a friend announcing the result of these “lessons in pure atheism.” The letter was intercepted, and Poushkin, now convicted of irreligion, besides being suspected of disloyalty, fell once more under the displeasure of the Government. His official career, which must have been as perplexing to his superiors as Shelley’s brief university life to his college authorities, was prematurely cut short. He was ordered to set out immediately for his father’s property at Mikhailovsky, in the Government of Pskov, where he arrived in August, 1824. His position was virtually that of a prisoner on the paternal estate. Rumours of his lawless excesses, and, worse still, of his atheism, had preceded him, and his father, afraid of the moral contamination for his other children, forbade all intercourse between them and the returned prodigal. That Poushkin suffered very keenly under the parental suspicion is evident from a letter written to Joukovsky shortly after his arrival at Mikhailovsky. “Dear friend, I take refuge with you. Judge of my situation. When first I came here I was well received ; but soon everything changed. My father, alarmed at my banishment, keeps on repeating that he expects to share the same fate. At first his irascibility and anger gave me no opportunity of explaining myself. I decided to say nothing. Then he began to reproach my

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brother, saying I was teaching him my atheism ; but still I kept silence. Finally, wishing to extricate myself from such a sad position, I asked leave to speak out frankly—nothing more. My father lost his temper, sent for my brother, and told him not to associate *avec ce monstre de fils dénature*. Joukovsky, think of my situation and advise me ! My head reels when I realise all this. I went again to my father ; I found him in his bedroom, and poured out all that had been weighing on my heart for the last three months ; I ended by saying that I spoke to him for the last time. Taking advantage of there being no witness of our interview, my father rushed from the room and declared to the whole household that I wished to kill him. . . . What is the object of this criminal accusation ? To send me dishonoured to the mines of Siberia ? . . . Save me from prison, or the Monastery of Solovets ! Save me once more ! Make haste, for my father's accusation is known to every one in the house. No one believes it, but they all gossip. The neighbours know it. Soon it will reach the Government : you know what will happen. For me there is no court of justice. I am *hors les lois*."

Joukovsky proved once again the "good angel" of the younger poet. The painful tension of the situation gradually relaxed, and Poushkin's father returned to the capital, leaving his son in the position of a prisoner on parole.

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The winter of 1824-5 was spent in solitude at Mikhailovsky. We may accept the fourth chapter of *Eugene Onegin* as a fairly accurate picture of his life at this time. The enforced quiet, the long hours of reflection, followed by days of steady work, were not without a beneficial effect upon Poushkin's moral and intellectual development. He now entered upon a new and more mature phase of life. The lessons in pure atheism were counteracted by assiduous study of the Scriptures, the results of which we see in some of the works of this period, especially in that fine paraphrase of the sixth chapter of Isaiah, known to every educated Russian as "The Prophet." Byron's influence began to wane perceptibly, and that of Shakespeare to become paramount. Finally, the one thing most needful to his independent development began to show itself in his work—the element of nationality. In this remote country place, where his old nurse, Arina Rodionova, was often his sole companion, Poushkin's mind reverted to those treasures of folk-lore which she had instilled into him in childhood. This was undoubtedly the most important transition period in Poushkin's career. He now cast aside all that was vague and exotic in his work and began to concern himself with the actualities of contemporary life.

*Eugene Onegin*, a novel in verse, begun under Byronic influences in South Russia, was continued

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at Mikhailovsky in a new spirit of unconscious realism.

Two versts from his father's property lay the estate of Trigovsky, the home of a charming family named Ossipov. In this quiet and gracious domestic circle Poushkin was a welcome guest. The two elder daughters of Madame Ossipov, by her first husband, Anna and Eupraskya Wulf, offered as piquant a contrast as the sisters Olga and Tatiana in *Eugene Onegin*, and it is generally conjectured that Poushkin sketched the two heroines of his poem from these actual types of Russian womanhood.

Poushkin's art undoubtedly gained by his intercourse with this typically virtuous and cultured family. But it was impossible that his active mind and restless ambition should continue to be content within such a narrow social circle. At times he found the monotony of Mikhailovsky unbearable ; and then he would indulge in wild schemes for making his escape abroad. In the autumn of 1825 he laid his plans, with the connivance of young Wulf, a student at the University of Dorpat. But in December, just as their scheme was ripe for action, one of the servants at Trigovsky returned from St. Petersburg with the startling news of the "Decembrist" revolt. The roads, he said, were blocked by soldiers, and he had had some difficulty in making his way through the military cordon.

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Poushkin was violently agitated by this intelligence. His exile at Mikhailovsky had sobered what was, after all, only a transient enthusiasm for the cause of rebellion. His midsummer madness of liberalism had certainly begun to wane. On the other hand, these men had been his associates, and he felt impelled by a generous feeling of comradeship to take part in the plot which he had had no hand in preparing. Early the next morning he started, determined to reach Petersburg at all risks. It is said that native superstition saved him from a tragic fate. Before he reached the first post-house he received warnings too dire to be disregarded by Russian credulity: first he met a priest; and in the fields a hare crossed his path three times. The former disciple of "pure atheism" retraced his steps, and well it was for Russian literature that he did so. It was enough that one poet of promise was actually offered on the gallows, a victim to his ill-devised and untimely attempt to give Russia a constitution. Poushkin, with his previous record, could hardly have hoped for a more merciful doom than that of Ryleiev. A few days later came tidings of the complete failure of the plot and the arrest of the leaders. Looking back upon his narrow escape, Poushkin seems to have undergone a sudden revulsion of feeling. He hastened to burn all his compromising letters and the autobiography on which he was engaged.

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Exceedingly weary of his sixteen months' banishment, and moved by that opportunist spirit which is one of Poushkin's least explicable characteristics, he was quick to see that his one chance of escape lay in a reconciliation with the new Government of Nicholas I. Early in 1826, therefore, Poushkin approached his influential friends in the capital in the hopes of being received once more into favour. In judging of his apparent inconsistency at this crisis of his life, we must make allowance for the fact that when he was associated with the Radical party, before his exile to South Russia, he was only twenty years of age, a time at which few men have formed settled convictions ; and while there seems little doubt that Poushkin believed most sincerely in his own liberalism, it appears equally clear to us, who overlook his entire career, that the associations of birth and position were stronger than his youthful enthusiasms, and that he never was, by temperament or conviction, a true democrat. He had certainly travelled far from his immature views of 1820 when, six years later, he attempted this compromise with the Government. His firm belief in his vatic mission, and in the sacred personality of the Poet, gave keenness to his longing for a wider sphere of influence. We must agree with Pypin that at least "his was not that narrow opportunism without sense of honour," but rather an intense desire for activity which enabled

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him to bend himself to circumstances rather than stand aside in misanthropic idleness.

Early in September, 1826, Poushkin's old nurse arrived one morning at Trigovsky, where the poet was spending the night, with the startling intelligence that an imperial courier was awaiting him at Mikhailovsky. A post carriage was standing at his door, and Poushkin, without any explanation, was carried off, full gallop, to Moscow. He was driven direct to the Kremlin, and, still bespattered with the mud of his long, swift journey, was hurried into the presence of Nicholas I. Poushkin gives the following account of his interview :—

“The Emperor, having conversed with me for some time, finally asked, ‘Poushkin, should you have taken part in the revolt of December 14th had you been in Petersburg?’

“‘Indubitably, *Gossoudar*; all my friends were in the plot, and I must have taken my share in it. My absence alone saved me—for which I thank God.’

“‘You have committed follies enough,’ replied the Emperor. ‘Now I trust you are reasonable, and that we shall never quarrel again. You must send me all you write. I myself will be your censor.’”

Poushkin was deeply touched by this reception, and eager to take service under so generous a master, whose clemency would give him an

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opportunity of working untrammelled to some lofty end. An Emperor's censorship—so he believed—would be merely nominal. His quick imagination conjured up a rose-coloured vision which shut out the inevitable disenchantment beyond, and blinded him to those methods of an iron-handed policy which were to try his loyalty to the utmost. The news of Poushkin's pardon was received with intense enthusiasm in the literary circles of Moscow. Wherever he went the poet met with an ovation, and, in his first joy at finding himself once more in a congenial world, it is not surprising that he failed immediately to realise the irksome conditions upon which he had regained his freedom.

As time went on he learnt that suspicion once incurred was like a stain hopelessly, tragically indelible. "All the perfumes of Arabia" would never sweeten Poushkin's reputation in the nostrils of the Government. Count Benkendorf, watchful and suspicious, was then Minister of Police. He never lost sight of the poet's early indiscretions. Nicholas might be Poushkin's censor in name, the Count took care to be so in fact. Now began that long series of petty annoyances, restrictions, and reprimands which put the poet's life on a level with that of a ticket-of-leave man, and led to the disenchantment and acquiescent languor which, as Dobrolioubov observes, is the final stage in the career of almost every Russian poet.

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Beneath the storms of cruel fate,  
Faded my wreath of blossoms lies ;  
In sadness and in solitude  
I linger, waiting for the end.

But before he reached the last stage Poushkin enjoyed some brief periods of comparative peace and untrammelled activity. They were soon interrupted. In 1827 he sent up a number of poems for the imperial approval. These were "The Upas Tree," "Stanzas," three more chapters of *Eugene Oniegin*, "Faust," "To Friends," and the "Songs of Stenka Razin." The majority of these works were passed; but of the last two Count Benkendorf wrote that "they were quite unsuitable for publication, not only as regards subject-matter, but because they were poor poetry; added to which the Church had excommunicated Stenka Razin equally with Pougachev." Under the stress of similar annoyances Poushkin became nervous and hypochondriacal; his life restless and disorganised. Sometimes he would throw himself into all the dissipations which surrounded him and seek distraction in cards and wine. Equally suddenly he would leave the town with a malediction on all its ways and bury himself in the country. Such reactions were beneficial to his literary production. Between 1827 and 1831 appeared the final chapters of *Eugene Oniegin*, *The Avaricious Knight*, *Don Juan*, *Poltava*, *Mozart* and

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*Salieri*, and several minor poems and prose works.

In 1828 Poushkin became acquainted with the Goncharev family, and was introduced to their daughter at a ball. The girl was only fifteen, but Poushkin was captivated by her youthful beauty, and three years later, in February, 1831, their wedding took place in Moscow. The marriage was not altogether happy. For a few months the Poushkines led a gay and fashionable life in Moscow, and then set up their household at Tsarsky Selo. Here Poushkin renewed his intimacy with Joukovsky and, as though in friendly rivalry with him, wrote a series of national poems, some of which are considered his best works. These were: *The Lay of Tsar Saltan*, *The Lay of Priest Ostolop*, *The Dead Tsarevna*, and *The Golden Cock*. Such poems were the outcome of free inspiration and an impulse in favour of national themes; but about this time Poushkin's work began to show that tendency towards "official nationalism" which did nothing to avert the suspicion of the authorities, while it partially alienated the public sympathy.

Two poems published in August, 1831, show this inclination to pose as the champion of the social *status quo*. Had there been a laureateship in Russia, Poushkin might have been suspected of coveting the office. The Government did not fail to acknowledge his change of attitude.

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In November he received a post in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs worth five thousand roubles a year. At the same time permission—amounting almost to a command—was given to him to search the Imperial Archives for material for a history of Peter the Great. A safe occupation for a poet of fiery temperament and liberal tendencies! The following years saw the completion of his *History of Pougachev's Rebellion*—a work which brought him in a considerable sum—of *The Captain's Daughter*, one of his best prose tales, and of several poems, including “The Roussalka” and “Doubrovsky.”

Poushkin threw himself into his historical studies with a fever born of discontent. His wife's style of living surpassed even his own in luxury and extravagance, and in spite of his official salary the pressure of debt was now added to his many troubles. A literary speculation, *The Contemporary*, started by him in all good faith as an organ which should aid the cause of progress and enlightenment while remaining loyal to the Government, did not prove the success he had hoped for. His position was indeed melancholy. His submission to authority had not won him the confidence of the Government, while it had undoubtedly estranged many of his most fervent admirers. He was keenly mortified by his failure to count as a great influence on either side; nor could he foresee a

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future in which—as has actually happened—his duality should cause him to be regarded as the representative of both phases of national sentiment.

Conscious that the great public was falling away from him, Poushkin addressed it directly in his poem “The People” with a bitterness and invective that recall, as Spassovich says, “the dispossessed Lear fleeing before the tempest.” Yet the poet was at the climax of his intellectual development, and seems to have been on the eve of acquiring the self-mastery and inward spiritual liberty of which no external circumstances could have had power to deprive him. A few years’ grace, even if they had not brought him “the poet’s rapt security,” the clear vision and self-dependence of a Goethe, would at least have left him stronger, more finely disciplined and composed. He had begun to find out for himself that “though there is no happiness on earth, there may be peace and freedom.”

A short time before his death a wave of depression seemed to sweep over his mind once more. In a letter to Madame Ossipov, his friend of years, he gives vent to a cry of despair: “I am bewildered and exasperated to the last degree. Believe me, life may have its pleasures, but every man bears some bitterness within which becomes intolerable in the end. The world is a disgusting and dirty swamp.” There was much excuse for this pessimistic outbreak. The clouds appeared

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to be gathering over Poushkin's life for some inevitable catastrophe. Skabichevsky shows how a coalition had been formed against the poet in the fashionable world, instigated by Ouvarov and Benkendorf. His enemies were only awaiting some chance of effecting his ruin, and the opportunity was not long in presenting itself. A flirtation—indiscreet, but not culpable—between Poushkin's young wife, then much feted in society, and a youthful guardsman, Baron de Heckeren-Dantès, proved all-sufficient for their purpose. A scandal, reflecting unpleasantly on Poushkin's honour, was set afloat, while at the same time the poet was pestered with hateful anonymous letters. The effect of this cunningly directed friction upon Poushkin's hasty and undisciplined temper may be easily foreseen. It was essential that he should not lose his head and calmer judgment, for Dantès was under the special protection of the Emperor, and any rupture would be sure to give displeasure at Court. But Poushkin being hyper-sensitive and, moreover, the child of an age that recognised but one remedy for outraged honour, fell an easy victim into the trap prepared for him. He believed himself bound to challenge Dantès, and on January 27th, 1837, a duel with pistols was fought in which the poet was mortally wounded. Danzas, Poushkin's second, maintained that even at the last moment the meeting might have been prevented, since Benkendorf

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had been informed of its time and place, but sent the police—whether by accident or design none could ever prove—in a totally different direction.

Poushkin was carried back to his house in St. Petersburg, where he died after two days of intense suffering. With the news of his death all Russian society awoke to the consciousness of its loss. The poet's weaknesses, his opportunism, his dalliance with both parties, were forgotten in a genuine outburst of sorrow and gratitude. Russia remembered only that Poushkin was the first and greatest of her national poets.

Of all the tributes to the memory of Poushkin, none awoke such enthusiasm as the impassioned verses which Lermontov—then scarcely known to fame—wrote in praise of “The Master.” These were passed from hand to hand, and afterwards, when the ten thousand printed copies were exhausted, from mouth to mouth.

Every class desired to honour the dead poet, but official suspicion dogged Poushkin, even to the grave. Fearing a demonstration, orders were given to remove his coffin to the church on the evening of February 1st. Admission to the requiem service was by ticket only, and thus the public was excluded from paying respect to his memory. Two days later, escorted by the police, Poushkin's remains were removed during the night and interred near those of his mother in the Sviatogorsky Ouspensky Monastery.

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## POUSHKIN : HIS WORKS

### II

Bielinsky's weighty articles, written between 1843 and 1846, remain to this day the sole exhaustive review of Poushkin's poems, and continue to form the basis of all close analysis of his work. But even these criticisms are lacking in the complete insight which comes of biographical research.

For many years after Poushkin's death the suspicion which still attached to his name, and the close censorship exercised over the publication of his literary remains, proved hindrances to the preparation of a complete biography of the poet. His life had to be largely compiled from hearsay, and when the first instalment of it appeared—which was not until twenty years after his death—it did not do much to elucidate certain matters which could not be safely handled even at that distance of time. To analyse his poetry in the light of biographical facts remained for years an impossibility, therefore Bielinsky's review of Poushkin's life-work is complete only from the purely æsthetic side. When at last the inner life of the man was revealed to the world, his moods, theories, and social views, public opinion was sharply divided, and every section of a disunited society strove to claim Poushkin as its own. He was hailed in turn as the defender of tradition, as

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the champion of social liberty, as the high-priest of pure art, as the founder of modern realism. And owing to the complexity of Poushkin's nature, these apparently irreconcilable claims have all some foundation of reason. Poushkin was essentially the child of his country and of his age, in whom were reflected all the varying shades of thought and emotion with which he was surrounded. Spassovich compares Poushkin's genius to a placid sheet of water, the surface of which is broken into circles that touch and interlink, each of these rings representing some sphere of external influence which widens and vanishes as it grows more remote from its centre. But Spassovich does not sufficiently realise that these reticulations were mainly superficial and scarcely disturbed the actual depths of Poushkin's individuality.

The poems dating from his schooldays, and the early satirical or "pamphlet" verses, are chiefly interesting as showing the extraordinary rapidity of his intellectual growth, and the care which, from the first, he bestowed upon the technical side of his art. We discern the influence of Joukovsky in the romantic colouring of some of these juvenile poems, and that of Batioushkov in the chiselled excellence of their workmanship. "Though they have not the quality of Byron's 'Hours of Idleness,'" says Bielinsky, "they astonish us by their elegance and felicity." In

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the verses entitled "To my comrades on leaving school," we find this lad of sixteen striving already after novelty of rhyme and rhythm, and venturing to use the simplest words, when they served his purpose, in preference to the insipid euphemisms of the pseudo-classical school. The popularity of his witty and epigrammatic verses was extraordinary, even at a period when that kind of anonymous literature was a feature of social life. "At that time," says a contemporary, "there was not a single ensign in the army, however illiterate, who did not know these verses by heart. Poushkin was the echo of his generation with all its faults and virtues."

The political extravagances of Poushkin's youth have been severely censured by some of his critics. Pypin, whose opinions are almost invariably just, because based upon a wide historical outlook, reminds us that his instability and lack of definite social convictions were the natural outcome of that period of unrest, when even Alexander I himself was carried away, first by Western liberalism and afterwards by the general reaction. One thing may be said in favour of Poushkin's satire : it was nearly always directed against what was actually injurious to society, and never used as the weapon of mere personal spite.

Upon the political verses followed a group of transitional poems, in which the influence of his

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Russian precursors is perceptibly on the wane, and that of Byron claims the ascendancy. One of the first indications of this phase is shown in a short poem, "The Black Shawl," a Moldavian song which the poet overheard in a tavern at Kishiniev, and afterwards adapted to his own fancy, infusing into it a drop of the true Byronic essence. Since this poem marks the starting-point of a new departure in Poushkin's career, I avail myself of Professor Morfill's kind permission to reprint his translation of it among the examples at the close of this chapter.

In *The Prisoner in the Caucasus* Spassovich sees "The Corsair" in another dress. But even this early poem, written at a time when Poushkin's admiration for Byron was in its most ardent and uncritical stage, marks the essential difference between the temperaments of the two poets. Poushkin's hero has far less of the self-centred, savage misanthropy of the Corsair; his dissatisfaction with society turns to brooding melancholy rather than to fierce protest. Speaking of this work in later life, Poushkin said, "It contains the verses of my heart," but his artistic judgment condemned it in his maturity.

*The Fountain of Bakchisarai* (1822) shows a steady advance in individuality, and when we come to *The Gipsies* (1824) and *Poltava* (1828), the difference in method and sentiment between master and disciple is distinctly notice-

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able. Aleko, the hero of *The Gipsies*, belongs to the picturesque type of social outcast who figures again and again in the works of both Byron and Poushkin. But Poushkin was already outgrowing the sombre self-sufficiency which made Byron pose as the leading character in most of his romantic poems. The Russian poet now began to regard his creation from an objective standpoint, sometimes even from a critical one. Byron, we feel sure, was in fullest sympathy with Conrad, Lara, and the Giaour; but when Poushkin puts into the mouth of the old gipsy leader his dignified reproof to the guest who has brought discord and bloodshed into the free and simple life of the caravan, we suspect that it is the poet himself who is criticising Aleko's unprofitable egoism. *The Gipsies* marks the second phase of Poushkin's worship of Byron.

A further stage of independent development is reached in *Poltava* which some critics rank as Poushkin's finest achievement. The poem shares the same subject as Byron's "Mazepa," but here the difference of treatment is not only due to temperamental causes, but also to a widely different historical point of view. While Byron founded his poem on a passage from Voltaire's *History of Charles XII*, Poushkin had recourse to national tradition; consequently his poem gains in convincing realism, although losing something in romantic glamour. Poushkin's Hetman of

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Cossacks is a rapacious, cunning, brutal soldier of fortune, scarcely a hero in any sense of the word. But the true hero of *Poltava* is not Mazeppa, but Peter the Great, whose character had an intense fascination for Poushkin, and to whose memory he dedicated one of the most powerful and polished of his poems, "The Bronze Horseman."

In none of Poushkin's works, however, can we trace his gradual emancipation from Byron's influence, and his steady progress towards independence and nationality, so clearly as in *Eugene Oniegin*. This, the most popular of his poems, also engaged his thoughts for the longest period ; being, in fact, a kind of confession, or autobiographical record, extending over seven years of his life. In 1823 Poushkin wrote to Prince Viazemsky, that he had begun a novel in verse in the style of "Don Juan," and in his preface to the first chapter, published in 1825, he says that the opening of his work will recall "'Beppo,' the facetious work of the gloomy Byron." But a year later he had left all thought of imitation so far behind that he indignantly denied any connection between *Oniegin* and "Beppo" or "Don Juan." The subject of the poem is drawn from contemporary life, and the design is simple to the verge of naïveté. The scene is laid in the heart of rural Russia. The first chapter introduces Madame Lerin and her

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daughters, Tatiana and Olga, who, as I have already related, were undoubtedly sketched from the sisters Wulf, and the old servant, Nurse Philipievna, the original of whom may have been Arina Rodionova.

Tatiana, an inexperienced, country-bred girl, falls in love with Eugene Oniegin, a disenchanted, world-weary rake who, somewhat against his will, is spending a few weeks in the neighbourhood with his friend Lensky, a sensitive, passionate youth, fresh from a German university. Lensky's tender but rather morbid temperament is at once the foil and the complement of the cold-blooded, egotistical Oniegin. So, too, Tatiana and her sister Olga make up between them the perfect sum of Russian womanhood. Tatiana has the Slav melancholy and dreamy sentimentality. She is religious, but still half believes in the fantastic, supernatural world of the peasantry ; the *domovoi* and the *roussalka* are realities to her. Her nature is sweet and sound to the core. Capable of folly for love's sake, she is incapable of dishonour. On the other hand, Olga is vivacious, practical, pleasure-loving, and, like Poushkin himself, something of an opportunist. As the time for Oniegin's departure draws near, Tatiana, with a want of reserve pardonable to her exceeding youth and innocence, confesses her love for him in a tender and indiscreet letter. By this time she has exalted Oniegin into a Galahad. He is incapable

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of understanding the motives which inspire her, or the timid shame which follows her action. To him the savour of love lies "not in the woman, but the chace"; since this unsophisticated country-girl seems to him at once an insipid and a forward "miss," he shakes her off, and reads her a cruel and cynical lesson. Meanwhile, being bored, he passes the time by flirting with Olga, who does not take life with such tiresome seriousness. Unhappily, Lensky's undisciplined nature flashes out at once into fierce jealousy and almost childish resentment of this conduct. A duel follows, foolish and causeless enough, as the critics have constantly pointed out, but not untrue to the morality and customs of the period. Oniegin shoots Lensky, and, heartless as he is, feels the sting of remorse. Having, like Childe Harold, run "through sin's long labyrinth," he now seeks forgetfulness from his troubled conscience in travel. Several years elapse, and Tatiana, married to an elderly husband whom she respects, has developed into a beautiful and brilliant woman of the world. Oniegin, on his return to Russia, meets her in society, and conceives a wild passion for the woman whose virginal love he had despised. Tatiana has never forgotten her early love; but she no longer feels for Oniegin the enthusiastic hero-worship with which he first inspired her. Hers is a saddened and chastened affection, in which disenchantment plays a part. She listens

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to Onegin's impassioned declaration, and does not hide from him the fact that she loves him still. But, at the critical moment, her sense of moral obligation triumphs, and she finds courage to give him his final dismissal.

Such is the simple basis of the poem into which Poushkin has infused so much of his best thought and most intimate feeling ; such the work which excited the wonder and admiration of a whole generation, who saw, for the first time, Russian scenery and Russian social life depicted with a touch of *realism*—a quality so novel that it had not yet found a term of expression. The elements of nationality and realism combined carried away the Russian public. Each new chapter of *Eugene Onegin* was eagerly awaited and devoured with unflagging interest.

A generation later the temper of the reading public in Russia underwent a complete change. The question of the sixties—that period of social and political unrest—was the submission of art to the requirements of everyday life. The utilitarians of those days repudiated *Eugene Onegin* as a picture of Russian life and morals, and refused to Poushkin anything but a superficial relationship to the “national idea,” as they themselves conceived it. It was idle, they argued, to waste time on the contemplation of anything, however beautiful, which did not tend to the solution of the great and pressing problems of social and

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political reform. Dobrolioubov and Pissariev, the representatives of utilitarianism, swept aside the theory of "art for art's sake," not in order to advance a new æsthetic doctrine in its place, but because art, pictorial and literary, seemed of no account to them except as a stepping-stone to their ultimate goal—the triumph of democratic principles. In stripping the laurels of nationality from Poushkin's head to place them on Gogol's brow, Dobrolioubov admits that with the poet literature first began to penetrate the social life, but concerned itself only with superficialities: the charms rather than the realities of existence.

To some extent Dobrolioubov was justified in his criticism. Contemporary questions were certainly not of the first interest to Poushkin. His aristocratic prejudices, and the cosmopolitan views he had imbibed early in life from a succession of foreign tutors, debarred him from identifying himself completely with the people; while his lofty conception of the poet's mission caused him to look with disdain upon those who held the belief that man could live by bread alone.

The economic scientists resented this Olympian attitude. Dobrolioubov's point of view is so characteristic of the change which was sweeping over Russian society in the early sixties that I feel constrained to quote him at some length. "We must acknowledge with considerable satis-

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faction that the class depicted by Poushkin—those who stood nearest to him and consequently interested him most—formed but a small minority. We feel satisfaction, because if the majority of the Russians had been of the same gifted type as Aleko and Oniegin, and if, being in the majority, they had remained such dandies as those gentlemen—Muscovites masquerading in Childe Harold's cloak—it would have proved a sorry business for Russia. Fortunately they were exceptions, and their likeness was not only incomprehensible to the people at large, but failed even to interest the greater portion of the educated public. . . . Poushkin was oppressed by the emptiness and triviality of life ; but this oppression, like that of his hero, Eugene Oniegin, was a sterile despair. He saw no issue from the void. There was nothing within from which he could rise to any serious convictions. He could only pour out his lyrical grievances.

There lies no goal before me,  
My heart is void, my brain is idle,  
And I weary of the anguish  
Of life's monotonous din."

Dobrolioubov doubted the national significance of *Eugene Oniegin*. Pissariev went a step farther, and denied Poushkin's claim to be considered, in any sense, a great poet. Pissariev, who represented the ultimate expression of the utilitarianism of his day, was a strong writer, possessing a wide

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knowledge of all strata of Russian society ; inspired by an ardent enthusiasm for the cause of social freedom, but unsound as a critic by reason of his boundless self-sufficiency and disregard of all æsthetic interests which could not be made to serve party purposes. The type of reviewer who would always have preferred the Corn Law Rhymer to Keats ; a Russian Jeffrey without the English critic's orderly mind. In his literary fists the most delicate Nankin would soon be reduced to a pile of potsherds. *Eugene Oniegin* easily becomes the butt of his cheap facetiousness. He compares the world-weariness of the hero to the repletion of a greasy merchant, who, having emptied his third samovar, regrets his inability to polish off thirty-three. Tatiana—prototype of so many Russian heroines—is quickly rifled of her delicate charms because she falls short of the healthy requirements of the new naturalism. "Our little Poushkin," says Pissariev, in concluding his review of the poet's works, "is merely an artist—nothing more. That is to say, he uses his artistic virtuosity as a medium whereby to let the whole reading public of Russia into the melancholy secret of his inward emptiness and intellectual weakness."

Such views are peculiarly representative of those phases of intolerant utilitarianism which from time to time have proved so inimical to the development of the arts in Russia. Pushed at

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moments to the verge of a literary terrorism, this dogmatic criticism has clamoured for the denunciation of every writer who has refused to pronounce the shibboleth of the extreme Radical party.

The rough-and-ready arguments of Pisariev notwithstanding, the influence of *Eugene Onegin* upon succeeding literary generations cannot be denied. Lensky and Onegin, even more than Tatiana and Olga, are the prototypes of contrasting individualities reincarnated over and over again in Russian fiction. Onegin, with his intellectual gifts, his disdain of everyday life, and his studied impassivity which passes for strength of character, created a favourite hero with the Russian novelists. Lensky's morbid sensibility, his tenderness and charm, and his fatal lack of will-power are continually repeated by writers from Poushkin to Tolstoi. He represents the individuality foredoomed to effacement in the presence of the egoist of the Onegin type. "Such a fate," says Golovin, "is shared by a long series of Tourgeniev's 'superfluous people' —the last of all being Nejdanov. The same with Tolstoi, who was the first to bow the knee before the innate virtues of weak and gentle characters in preference to the strong and proud. Sometimes we see these twins united in one personality, in whom, under an external show of strength, lies concealed some incurable weakness. Such are

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Beltov, Tamarin, Roudin, Raisky, and Lavretsky." The chief personalities in *Eugene Oniegin* have proved that they had sufficient vitality to outlive their old-fashioned environment, and to found a long line of fictional descendants. Long before Poushkin had completed *Eugene Oniegin*, he had discovered the limitations of his early model. "Byron," he writes during this transition period, "can only draw one character—himself." But Byronism had done its work in strengthening in Poushkin his sense of individual importance, and freeing him from the bands of convention by which Russian literature, hitherto an artificial rather than an indigenous growth, had been strictly bound.

From the time of his exile at Mikhailovsky in 1824, Poushkin rises in each subsequent work to greater artistic perfection, shows more mature originality, and attains to that objective plasticity by which he sometimes approaches Goethe and Shakespeare. The study of Karamzin and of the greatest of English dramatists now resulted in the historical play *Boris Godounov*.

As in "Macbeth," ambition, coupled with remorse, is the moving passion of the play. The insane cruelty of Ivan the Terrible deprived Russia of almost every strong and helpful spirit, with the exception of the sagacious and politic boyar, Boris Godounov, the descendant of a Tatar family.

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Brother-in-law of Ivan's half-witted heir, Feodor, he was already practically the ruler of Russia before ambition whispered that he might actually wear the crown. Only the young Tsarevich Dmitri, a child of six, stood between him and the fulfilment of his desires. In 1581 Dmitri was murdered, and suspicion fell upon Boris. The latter managed to exculpate himself, and in due course was chosen as Feodor's successor. He reigned wisely and with authority. But Nemesis only tarried, to appear ere long in the person of the False Demetrius, whose pretensions were eagerly supported by the Poles. Boris, unhinged by the secret workings of his conscience, mistook the pretender for the ghost of his victim, and temporarily lost his reason. The people, who had never quite reconciled themselves to a ruler of Tatar origin, wavered in their allegiance, and, urged on by Rome, the Poles took advantage of this opportunity to advance upon Moscow. At this critical juncture Boris was seized with illness. It was hinted that he had been poisoned. He lived long enough to nominate his son as his successor, and died in his fifty-sixth year, in April, 1605.

For intellectual force and fine workmanship there is much to be admired in *Boris Godounov*. But the insight, the passion, and copious humour of our Elizabethans find no echo in Poushkin. We wonder what Webster would have made of

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this dark and lurid page of history. Poushkin has not the power to show us how

Rage, anguish, harrowing fear, heart-crazing crime  
Make monstrous all the murderous face of Time  
. . . in the spherical orbit of a glass  
Revolving.

There are moments of forcible eloquence in *Boris Godounov*, and those portions of the play which deal with the Russian populace are undoubtedly the strongest. Here Poushkin disengages himself from theatrical conventions and shows direct observation of human nature, as well as an accurate knowledge of the national characteristics.

Like most of his predecessors, the poet possessed a wonderful faculty of assimilation, even, in some rare instances, improving what he borrowed. An interesting specimen of his powers in this respect is *A Feast during the Plague*, an adaptation of John Wilson's insipid drama *The City of the Plague*. Poushkin's work is only a fragment of the original, but it is impossible to compare the two works without being convinced that the Russian poet has actually performed the miracle of gathering figs from thistles. *The Avaricious Knight* is one of those clever pieces of literary mystification which were much in vogue at that period. Poushkin passed it off as a translation from the English poet Shenstone.

We have seen how the influence of Poushkin

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suffered a temporary eclipse during the acute political crisis of the sixties, when the works of Nekrassov, the “poet of vengeance and of grief,” reached the climax of their popularity. It now remains to show how, twenty years later, the greatest Russian writers united to restore him to his rightful place in the hierarchy of Russian literature. This act of restitution took place at the ceremony of unveiling the Poushkin Monument in Moscow, July, 1880. On this occasion, Tourgeniev, Ostrovsky, Dostoievsky, and others addressed a vast assemblage, moved by one desire—to pay homage to the memory of the first national poet. From Ostrovsky’s speech I have already quoted a few significant words.

Tourgeniev spoke with the reserve which almost invariably characterised his verdicts upon Russian art and literature, yet he admitted that in Poushkin: “Russian genius and Russian receptivity are united in one harmonious whole; that the very essence of the Russian nationality is transfused into his works. Above all,” he concluded, “we find in Poushkin’s poems that great liberating force which ennobles and elevates all who come in contact with it.” Tourgeniev leaves us to deduce from his words what his habitual scepticism forbids him to assert—that Poushkin was not only a consummate artist, but a *national* poet in the truest sense of the word.

Some years previously, Gogol had already paid

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his tribute to the genius of Poushkin in these fervent words : “At the name of Poushkin we are impelled to cross ourselves, as it were, at the thought of our national poet ; for no other Russian has an equal claim to his title. Poushkin is an extraordinary, perhaps a unique, phenomenon of the Russian spirit. He is a Russian in his final stage of development, as he may possibly appear two hundred years hence. In him the Russian soul, language, and temperament are reflected as clearly as a landscape is reproduced in the convex surface of a field-glass.”

It is, however, to Dostoievsky—speaking in Moscow on the occasion to which I have already referred—that we must look for the most impassioned vindication of Poushkin’s claim to the eternal veneration of his countrymen. Dostoievsky, with his penetrative insight into the human heart, his divination of intimate feeling and his inspired tenderness, saw further into Poushkin’s genius than any one else ; saw things hidden from the “wise and prudent” critics of the type of Dobrolioubov and Pissariev, and revealed them in language which must have seemed to them exaggerated and mystical. I can only condense some of his most striking observations. Poushkin, he says, created two types, Oniegin and Tatiana, who sum up the most intimate secrets of Russian psychology, who represent its past and present with all conceivable artistic skill, and

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indicate its future in features of inimitable beauty. In thus putting before us that type of Russian who is "an exile in his own land," and divining his vast significance in the historical destiny of the nation, and in placing at his side the type of positive and indisputable moral beauty in the person of a Russian woman, Poushkin binds himself to his nationality by ties of kin and sympathy, as no writer ever did before, or has done since.

If to deliver a final judgment upon Poushkin has hitherto proved a task beyond the powers of the Russian critics, it would be presumptuous in a foreigner to attempt it. The most insuperable obstacle to a decisive opinion is to be found in the contradictions which lay at the root of the poet's life and character. It seems impossible to bring into agreement both sides of Poushkin's nature. On the one hand we see his aristocratic prejudices and his cosmopolitan outlook ; on the other, his intimate acquaintance with many phases of Russian life and his love of the poetry of the people. Again, we see his generous aspirations towards freedom and enlightenment, coupled with an admiration for the Imperial system which certainly sprang from a deeper sentiment than mere "official" loyalty, assumed at the dictates of self-interest. How reconcile his rarefied idealism with his unconscious realism ; his impulses of headstrong audacity with his moments of voluntary compromise ; his phases of atheism with his

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hours of deep religious sentiment; his clear, sceptical intellect with the atmosphere of self-deception in which he could envelop himself at will? These inconsistencies must ever baffle and bewilder those who are not content to leave an absolute verdict in abeyance.

If to a more strenuous generation Poushkin appeared indifferent to the burning social questions of his day, it must be remembered that during the second and third decades of the nineteenth century Russian life was not the complex, heart-breaking tangle it has since become. Besides, is it not more than probable that Poushkin rendered a greater service to his country by being simply the great artist he was, than he would have done by subordinating his genius exclusively to social and political interests?

He embodied all that preceded him in Russian literature, while he also inaugurated a new period. He was the most perfect master of his material who had yet appeared in Russia, and never fails to impress us by the artistic skill with which he uses his native language as a tool which, though he had not actually forged it for himself, he learnt to temper and sharpen to the most delicate uses. Although he introduced the element of realism, he ignored its baser purposes. He ennobled everything he touched. He possessed an impeccable sense of form, an irresistible musical charm, and a felicity of expression and picturesqueness

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of vision which remain to this day his legacy to many Russian poets and novelists who followed him. Although his liberalism was not of the fervent, uncalculating kind which might have led him to share the fate of a Ryleiev or even of the exiled Tchernichevsky, it is an injustice to assert that he contributed nothing to the advancement of his time. Undoubtedly, in his own words, he “praised liberty and sang of mercy in an iron age.” Some lines from one of his latest poems seem to indicate that, had he been spared, his work in future would have been more “lovely and more temperate,” more fearless and serene :—

Be docile to God’s will, O Muse.  
Fear no affront and crave no laurel crown ;  
Meet human praise and blame alike unmoved,  
Nor turn from out thy path to strive with fools.



LERMONTOV



## LERMONTOV

### I

THOSE "watchers of the skies" who scanned the literary horizon when Poushkin's light had set saw a radiant meteor flash across the night and vanish into space. The bright visitant passed too soon from view. Compounded of all fiery and inflammable elements, Lermontov may be fitly compared to one of those aerolites whose apparition, while it lasts, is more arresting than that of moon or stars. Like the meteor, too, when his exalted and ardent nature came in contact with the atmosphere of the actual world, it seemed to suffer a similar disintegration. Into what form his genius might have finally crystallised it is hard to say, for his development was prematurely checked. At the time of his appearance he promised to rival the glory of Poushkin, because his passion was more intense and his personality more sincere. His working years were few; but his attraction was immense, for none of the Russian poets felt and expressed the results of the romantic movement so fully as he did.

Lermontov's life was marked throughout by stress and suffering. He lived at a time when the attitude of art towards social questions was

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beginning to agitate the critical conscience in Russia. It was a natural reaction against social privilege and the spirit of Olympian arrogance in literature that led men to attach less importance to style than to matter ; to expect not so much artistic perfection of design as a humanitarian and progressive significance. Lermontov felt but was hardly prepared to respond to this demand that poetry should be “a criticism of life.” His was too passionate and indomitable a personality to sink into the kind of æsthetic quietism in which the direct followers of Poushkin sought refuge from the problems of their day. He realised the necessity of bringing his genius into some kind of touch with this social awakening, which, living a few years later, he could not ignore to the same degree as Poushkin. Besides, Poushkin was essentially the artist-poet, demanding the calm shelter of some “upland lawn” on Parnassus in which to work out his æsthetic reconciliation with life ; while in Lermontov life and poetry were indivisibly made one. But, educated without ideal convictions, in a narrow and unfruitful plot of society, how was the poet to attain to any broad or clear philosophic outlook ?

A solitary and secluded childhood, and a dreamy, undisciplined youth, flung him upon the world “unpractised and unprepared.” In his early years, a serious illness left him for a time languid and unfit for boyish games. During this

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time his imagination became his most absorbing toy. A precocious love of literature stimulated his morbid sensibility. Vague yearnings for chivalrous action and an unhealthy self-exaltation held him in a world of phantasy. This incessant nourishment from within was a poor preparation for that contact with the actual which was inevitable to a mind so active and far-reaching as that of Lermontov. The shock, when it came, was a severe test of his moral strength, which had not the fibre or pliability of a Goethe's or a Wordsworth's. The immediate results were the disenchantment, agitation, and bitter resentment that make such sad, discordant music in all his early poetry. Nor do even his latest works show anything like a complete reconciliation with life. Lermontov was never able to bend himself into those moods of tentative compromise with the imperfections of society in which Poushkin found respite. He was by nature *intransigeant* and a stranger to all compliance. To the end he remained, like his own Demon-hero,

alone in his pride,  
Alone, as erst, without hope, without love.

The materials for the biography of Lermontov are comparatively scanty; but his poems go far to supply this deficiency. In no other writer—with the exceptions perhaps of Rousseau and Byron—are the processes of self-analysis and self-revelation so clearly and continually visible.

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Michael Yourievich Lermontov was born at Moscow, October 3rd, 1814 (Russian style). His father, an officer who never rose to any distinction in the service, was of Scotch descent, his name being merely the Russianised form of Learmont. It delighted the boy's romantic spirit —Lermontov was an eager reader of Scott's novels—to feel himself a blood relation to the heroes of Scottish chivalry. The poet's mother was of a rich and aristocratic family, and her runaway match with the penniless young officer gave great offence to her own people. Nor did the love match turn out happily for the woman who sacrificed so much. She soon returned to live with her mother, and died in the third year of her married life, leaving one little son, the future poet.

Thus the child's domestic surroundings, from the hour of his birth, were not ideally happy. He was adopted by his maternal grandmother, Madame Arseniev, who cherished him all his life with tender, if unwise, devotion. The closer her affection wound itself round her grandson, the more Madame Arseniev was disposed to exaggerate what she termed "the depravity" of his father. In order to bring up her charge as far as possible outside the reach of his influence, she lived nearly always on her country estate in the Government of Penza. The elder Lermontov seems to have been neither very immoral nor

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very interesting ; merely a rather contemptible specimen of the average *roué*. But he did not in the least correspond to the dreams which in childhood the poet used to weave around the personality of his banished and calumniated parent. The sordid squabble between Madame Arseniev and her son-in-law was prolonged throughout the poet's youth, and the spectacle of the two beings he loved—and should have respected—bickering and bargaining for his childish affection left an evil impression on his mind. These discussions aggravated his morbid sensibility, but his precocious and unrestricted reading was probably a more important factor in the development of his character. The note of suffering and despair which sounds in the poems of his early youth can hardly have been the outcome of direct experience. It must have been partly borrowed from the literature on which he fed. His grandmother spared neither pains nor money to give him a first-rate private education. But the society which surrounded him was perhaps too exclusively feminine to be altogether wholesome. It accentuated the softer side of his character at the expense of virility. At the age when Poushkin's precocious genius was coming in contact with the great men and realities of his time, Lermontov was acquiring his knowledge of the world from books, or from a narrow circle of women who spoilt him.

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At ten years of age Lermontov accompanied his grandmother on a journey to the Caucasus, and the sublime beauty of the scenery made a deep impression upon the child who was afterwards to be the chief singer of its characteristics. During this visit he experienced his first precocious passion, of which he afterwards spoke in the following terms: "It was a real passion. Young as I then was, I have never loved in the same way since." Instances of precocious passion in lads barely in their teens for a woman older than themselves are by no means rare, especially among the poets; but Lermontov's first love was unusual, because it had for its object a child of his own age.

At thirteen Lermontov was sent to a boarding school in Moscow to prepare for the University, which he left in 1832 at the age of eighteen. The habits of reserve and morbid introspection, inculcated by his solitary childhood, followed him to school and to the University. But though his coldness and disdain caused him to be somewhat unpopular among his comrades, he made common cause with them against the narrowness and ineptitude of their teachers. For taking part in a demonstration against one of the most incompetent professors, he was sent down from the University before he had taken his final degree.

From Moscow Lermontov went to Petersburg, hoping to be admitted to the final courses at the

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University. But the authorities, who probably regarded him as an undesirable acquisition, refused to take into consideration the two years already spent in Moscow. Being practically debarred from a university career, Lermontov had no choice but to enter one of the military academies. He accepted his destiny in a half-fatalistic, half-ironical spirit. Writing to a friend in 1832 he says :—

“ Hitherto I have lived for literature—the ungrateful idol to whom so many victims are sacrificed ; now I am a soldier. Perhaps it is the will of Providence. Perhaps it is the shortest way ; and if it does not lead to my original goal, it may at least lead to that ultimate bourn where all things end. Well, better to die by a bullet in one’s heart than by the slow decay of old age.”

The Guards School, which Lermontov now entered, was recruited exclusively from the wealthy and aristocratic classes. In this new atmosphere the reserve of his early youth underwent a reaction, and he shared in all the mad dissipations and scandalous extravagances of his companions. This life did nothing to promote his intellectual development, and much of the verse which he wrote at this time is of an unpleasantly erotic nature. The most repellent feature of his character—his supercilious coldness—must, however, have been somewhat modified by his mode of life in the cadet school. Far more injurious to his

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moral character were the first few years of his military life in Petersburg. Gazetted to a smart hussar regiment, having already acquired a taste for luxury and dissipation, Lermontov's youthful aspirations towards great achievements degenerated for a time into a mere thirst for notoriety. It was his ambition to shine as a dandy and a "rip." But though his family was noble and his means ample, neither were sufficient to procure him admission to the most fashionable circles. According to the testimony of his contemporaries, he was at this time a plain, awkward young man, whom the world hardly suspected of being a poet. In spite of this phase of moral deterioration, and the constant effort to force an entrance into a brilliant social sphere, Lermontov did not entirely neglect his intellectual interests.

Between 1828 and 1832 he wrote most of his early lyrical poems, besides *The Demon*, *Ismaïl Bey*, the historical tales, and the plays. These works show traces of the spiritual conflict which absorbed him, and we cannot wonder that he seemed to his companions a being remote from themselves. Notwithstanding the fact that Lermontov's output of work was considerable, he made comparatively few efforts to see himself in print. His attitude towards his early works was exceedingly critical, and it was not until Poushkin's death, in 1837, provoked that passionate outburst of grief and resentment of which mention has

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already been made, that he became generally known as a poet. The whole tone of his lament is that of burning indignation against a frivolous society which, having subjected Poushkin to insult during his lifetime, was prepared to shed a few belated tears now that

The echo of his wondrous song is dead,  
And never shall on earth resound again ;  
Since dark and narrow is the poet's grave,  
And on his silent lips is set death's seal.

Yet the poem might have escaped the censure of the authorities, had not Lermontov, goaded to fresh fury by some new affront offered to Poushkin's memory, added a sting to its tail in the form of sixteen lines decidedly violent in expression. In these he apostrophised the poet's calumniators as "the vain descendants of a line famed only for its baseness ; the murderers of genius, truth, and fame." Two influential members of the Court circle believed these lines to have been specially aimed at themselves. The matter was reported to the Emperor in the most unfavourable light, and Lermontov was exiled to the Caucasus. His grandmother succeeded in reducing his term of banishment to a year ; but even this brief respite from the atmosphere of intrigue and dissipation proved beneficial to his literary work.

The years of his childhood, spent among country surroundings, had imbued Lermontov

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with a love of folk-lore, and put him in touch with the popular life. He always regretted that, unlike Poushkin, he had had no Arina Rodionova to sing him to sleep with the national songs. Nevertheless, his knowledge of popular tradition and of history was considerable, and is fully displayed in his *Ballad of the Tsar Ivan Vassilievich, his young Oprichnik, and the bold merchant Kalashnikov*. The extraordinary success with which Lermontov has revived the genius of the old Russian legends, while at the same time he stamps it with the seal of his own peculiar poetical eloquence, makes this ballad one of the most interesting—as it is one of the most untranslatable—of his works. This is no archaic pastiche, but the essential material of the historic past, fused and remodelled in the poet's own fashion.

Before the publication of this ballad, the first edition of *The Demon* had already appeared, in which Lermontov first incarnates that particular type of hero, who, being in truth the poet's *alter ego*, attends him under various disguises to the end of his days. This hero, of whom Byron probably represented the reality, haunted Lermontov from a very early age. In one of his later poems (1841) he says: “My youthful mind was troubled. . . . By a mighty figure. Among other visions. . . . Like a king he blazed forth, proud and taciturn. . . . Withal, with such magic

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sweetness of beauty—'twas awesome. . . . My spirit shuddered; and this wild vision. . . . Haunted my mind for years. . . . But I left him at last for other dreams. . . . I exorcised him with verse." It is doubtful if, in reality, this "kingly vision" ever lost its prestige for Lermontov; at least, by a kind of atavism, the heroes of nearly all his subsequent works may be referred to this original type.

From his exile to the Caucasus Lermontov returned to his place in Petersburg society. By this time his reputation as a poet made him a welcome guest in those aristocratic drawing-rooms where, a year or two earlier, it had been his great ambition to blaze forth "the comet of a season." But the cup of social success, once within his reach, seems to have brought him nausea rather than pleasurable intoxication. "I must tell you I am the most wretched of mortals, and you will believe it when you hear that I am at a ball every night," he writes to a friend at this period. "For a whole month I have been the fashion. . . . The people I have more or less maltreated in my verses now flatter me; the prettiest women besiege me for poems. And yet I am bored."

In 1839, Lermontov wrote several poems, including *Mtsieri*, a *Georgian tale*, and his novel, *A Hero of our Day*. But in 1840, his life in the capital was again interrupted by a scandal far

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more discreditable than his generous, though ill-advised, attack upon the detractors of Poushkin. The result of this affair was a duel fought with the son of the historian, Baron de Barante, at that time French ambassador at the Russian Court. For this indiscretion Lermontov was again exiled to the Caucasus, and this time he seems to have broken once for all with the fashionable life that had first dazzled and then wearied him. The following year he paid a flying visit to his grandmother in the capital, but soon returned to his permanent quarters at Piatagorsk. All accounts of his life at this time seem to point to the fact that he was passing through a crisis which was probably as much physical as mental. His nervous tension was such that, like Rousseau, he seems to have been unable to bear the society of his fellow-men without experiencing dangerous friction. His conduct was that of a disenchanted man, angry with the world, and weary of the life which had "smouldered slowly through, leaving him without any illuminating ideals." He was in the frame of mind when men quarrel with the first comer, and the second duel which he now brought upon himself had not even the excuse of a cutting insult or a master-passion. One of his brother officers, a certain Major Martinov, paid considerable attention to a beautiful young lady, whom the poet chose to regard as his special property. The two men met almost daily at the

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house of her mother, and Lermontov took an early opportunity of making his rival the butt of one of those caustic and unpleasant witticisms for which he enjoyed an evil reputation. A meeting was arranged on July 15th, 1841, in a quiet spot among the mountains, and Lermontov, who seems actually to have courted his fate, fell, shot through the body, and died almost immediately. In his poem "The Dream," written some time before this occurrence, he foreshadowed with extraordinary accuracy the circumstances of his tragic end.

Lermontov was only twenty-seven at the time of his death, and it seems probable that he then stood on the verge of a moral and intellectual crisis, after which his extravagant, subjective idealism might have assumed some sort of harmony with the reality of life. Not that, like Goethe or Poushkin, he showed signs of a reserve force of healthy objective sentiment which would have enabled him to throw off once for all the morbid sensibility of his period of storm and stress in such a work as *The Sorrows of Werther* or *Eugene Oniegin*. From Lermontov the waste products of self-analysis and restless dissatisfaction would not easily have been eliminated. We cannot imagine him making a great act of renunciation, and learning with Goethe the calming lesson of life, "Entbehren sollst du." But from his later works we seem to feel that the most

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critical phase in the fever of sensuous emotion and chaotic romanticism which possessed his youth was passing away ; that he was about to grasp that impassioned realism, so well understood by the Russian mind, which might eventually have brought into convincing and harmonious shape the wild dreams of his early manhood. But it is in his poems, rather than in his life, that we trace most clearly the evidences of this spiritual reaction, never destined to work itself out to a satisfactory end.

## LERMONTOV : HIS WORKS

### II

The prevailing element of Lermontov's poetry is an intense melancholy, partly temperamental, partly derivative. As regards his natural pessimism, this may be accounted for in a measure by the circumstances of his birth.

Lermontov was the child of a sad and disillusioned mother, and probably inherited a morbid sensibility which was fostered by precocious reading and too much solitude. Still, as we have seen, the tragic element in his early life was hardly sufficient to account for such premature bitterness, nor for the loss of that peace and happiness which he regrets before reaching his fourteenth year.

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We are forced to the conclusion that this precocious pessimism was not so much an innate disorder of the mind as a disease caught by contact with some stronger and darker spirit.

From what sources then was this melancholy derived? It was not of the kind which had been recently in the air, at least in Russia. If we glance at Lermontov's early poems, written before 1831, we shall find that the sadness which tinges them is of quite a different dye from that which prevails in the sentimental school of Joukovsky, Delvig, Baratinsky, and even Poushkin in his youth. These "weeping poets" desired eternal youth, eternal fidelity, and a year which was always at the spring. Lermontov's aspirations are not simply intangible yearnings for the infinite; they are essentially of this world. He craves for action and for fame, and is attracted by all that has movement and colour. His imagination is not steeped in a vague mist of tears, but ablaze with romantic feeling and stirred by heroic achievement. Lermontov began with full confidence in his own powers:—

There is no grave for the divine.  
When I am turned to dust, my dreams  
Shall by a wondering world be blest,  
Which cannot grasp them now.

Save for one or two poems which echo the style of Poushkin, Lermontov is not greatly indebted to his fellow-countrymen. But besides

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Russian poetry, he read Goethe, Schiller, Heine, Cowper, Scott, and, above all, Byron. Of Shelley, most of his biographers seem to be agreed that Lermontov knew nothing whatever. As a poet, however, he shares with him that ineffable charm and fervid eloquence that are the insignia of the very elect. It is interesting to speculate what might have been the influence of the idealist Shelley, the enthusiast for humanity, upon the idealist Lermontov, who was certainly not "humane" in Shelley's sense of the word. Goethe's philosophy was incomprehensible to Lermontov. The self-limitation of the former, his reconciliation with the imperfect conditions of human life, his conviction of the existence of "the Eternal, the Necessary, the Universal," and his ready acquiescence in the responsibilities of existence, were impossible to the undisciplined, wholly impulsive nature of the Russian poet. With Schiller, Lermontov was more in touch on the romantic side. All that was heroic and highly coloured in the author of "The Robbers" appealed to him; but in Lermontov the note of Teutonic sentimentality was entirely lacking. Heine's pessimism, with its satirical vein, which spared neither himself nor his vocation, was not in accordance with Lermontov's exalted view of his own personality and genius. His egotism urged him to look without, rather than within, for the causes of his self-contradiction. Shake-

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speare he knew, but never felt his influence deeply, as did Poushkin. Cowper and Scott left no permanent traces upon his intellectual development. There remains Byron as the guiding light of his young imagination.

It was probably about 1829 that Lermontov first became acquainted with the works of this poet. At least, according to the testimony of his contemporaries, we know that one English book was the constant companion of his school days—the Poetical Works of Byron. Poushkin, as we have seen, was drawn to Byron for a time; but with Lermontov it was a case of recognition rather than of magnetism. Lermontov divined in Byron many of his own constituent elements, and confessed as much when he said. “I am Byron with a Russian soul.” It was clearly a spiritual affinity rather than mere imitation which drew them together. Lermontov was too like Byron in many respects to need making up in order to pass as “a masquerader in Childe Harold’s cloak.” Both poets filled the chief parts in their own poems and dramas. Byron’s heroes possessed all those attributes which Lermontov most desired to unite in his own person: a dominating will, a spirit of rebellion against social conventions, gallantry in love and war. But the chivalrous type of Byronic hero—the prototype of the poet himself, laying down his life for the weak and oppressed—never appears in Lermontov’s

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poems. His heroes are egotists who echo the sentiment of their author: "Do not mock yourself by seeking pity in this breast! Since I despise my own sufferings, what to me are the sufferings of others?" It was, therefore, only the negative side of Byronism that appealed to Lermontov.

The circumstances of the Russian poet's life shut him out from participation in Byron's wider and more humane philosophy. One of Lermontov's most penetrating critics, N. Kotliarevsky, says in his admirable study of the poet: "He accepted the pose of the Byronic hero, but the character-development was all his own. He was always his own model. We must remember, therefore, that Byron's influence was one-sided. The positive aspect of Byron's work became more intelligible to him when viewed in the light of more mature experience. But this closer intimacy with actual people and vital interests did not come easily to Lermontov. His situation was too isolated, and the consciousness that his pose was a false one led to those outbreaks of irritable pessimism in which he spares neither his past, present, nor future, but hurls one curse alike upon memory and hope." But if the incomplete influence of Byron did not help him to solve the vital questions of life, it certainly did something for his moral development. Byron, as the champion of personal pride and the fullest individual

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liberty, sustained the poet in the most difficult years of his life—1832 to 1839—kept alive his faith in his poetic mission, and saved him from moral disintegration.

The poems generally supposed to bear the most direct evidence of Byron's influence are *The Demon* and *Mtsieri*.

*The Demon*, which Lermontov judged with unnecessary severity in later years, contains, nevertheless, the essence of his early genius. Moreover, like Poushkin's *Eugene Oniegin*, it occupied and interested him over a period of nearly as many years, and became the receptacle of his most intimate feelings. The subject, which is linked with a legend of the Caucasus, is as simple and naïve as that of *Eugene Oniegin*—allowing, of course, for the romanticism of the first and the realism of the latter. But the setting of *The Demon* is as beautiful, and in its accessories as exquisite, as any poem of Shelley's, and shows that, even at sixteen, Lermontov was a consummate artist in words.

The Demon, that “sad and exiled spirit,” is discovered hovering over the summit of Kazbec, looking down upon the magnificent panorama of a world which he has come to regard with indifference. We soon perceive that the malady of the Demon is not so much the baffled ambition and desperate craving for revenge which inspires Milton's Satan, as the weariness born of satiety.

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There is little of the sublime in his opening monologue. He does not curse God in his bitterness, and add the name of the sun

to tell thee how I hate thy beams,  
That bring remembrance from what state  
I fell, how glorious once above thy sphere,  
Till pride and worse ambition threw me down,  
Warring in Heaven against Heaven's matchless King.

The Demon's regrets are such as a light-principled, but not wholly callous, man might naturally feel for the unsophisticated whiteness of his childhood. Chiefly, however, he regrets that there is nothing more left to do, to feel, or even to suffer. Nature has ceased to delight him ; humanity falls only too easy a prey to his wiles. He has sown evil until even evil wearis him. At this stage of his reflections the Demon, as the one way of colouring the greyness of life, takes the very human course of falling in love. Clearly the Demon is not Satan, nor has he any affinity to that subtle "disintegrating spirit" in whom Goethe has embodied all that is negative and destructive to life and energy. The Demon is a mortal with certain "demonic" attributes. When we look closer we recognise the poet himself, who shares, too, the same tendency to seek in woman's love the refuge from his despair and weariness. From the moment he sees the beautiful Circassian maiden Tamara, dancing among her maidens on her bridal eve, the Demon becomes more and

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more purely human in his feelings and actions. The first awakening of passion brings the long-forgotten thought of redemption.

Presumably his evil *supernatural* influence brings about the murder of Tamara's lover by brigands, as he rides full gallop to claim his bride in the palace of her father Gudal. But afterwards the Demon consoles the weeping bride in words which have no demoniacal quality, are indeed a little commonplace in sentiment, yet—thanks to the poet's art—as exquisitely musical as anything in the Russian language. It is in lyrical flights like these that we feel Lermontov's poetical affinity to Shelley rather than to Byron; therefore, it is perhaps the more unpardonable to offer the pearlless shell of a translation.

Weep not, child, since all in vain  
On his cold and silent corpse  
Fall your tears like living rain.

O'er the vast aerial sea,  
Sailless, with no helm to guide,  
Choirs of stars in harmony  
Through the chartless ether glide.

'Mid illimitable space,  
Fleecy cloud-flocks, lucent, white,  
Cross the Heavens and leave no trace  
Of their unsubstantial flight.

Hours of parting, hours of meeting,  
Bring them neither joy nor sorrow;  
Of the past they go unweeting,  
Hoping nothing from to-morrow.

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In this hour of dire distress  
Let thy thoughts towards them stray,  
And to earthly pain and stress  
Be insensible as they.

In order to escape from the burning passion and unholy desires suggested by her mysterious lover, Tamara enters a convent. But he follows her, even upon this sanctified ground, though not, let it be said, without some honourable and manly twinges of the demon-conscience. For a moment "he hesitated and seemed prepared to abandon his sinister design." Then the opportunity of redemption through love passes, and he enters her cell, to confront her good angel on the threshold. This is one of the weakest scenes in the poem, and we can only account for the angel's rapid discomfiture and flight on the supposition that it was no guardian spirit, but only the poor, weak, loving soul of Tamara herself. The Demon enjoys a brief hour of triumph. Tamara, haunted by his voice and his invisible presence by night and day, unable to exorcise his influence by prayers or vigils, loses her reason and dies. The gates of Paradise are opened to her, as to Margaret in "Faust," because by its purity and self-sacrifice her passion works out its own atonement. But the Demon remains as before, isolated and dissatisfied, "without hope and without love."

*The Demon* appealed to its own generation,

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and brought forth in Russia a crowd of minor demons, who strutted in the streets and on the parade-ground in uniforms civil and military, just as scores of melancholy, homeless spirits wandered over the Western world in the cloak of Childe Harold. Now, the poem attracts us not for its symbolism, but for its descriptive power and great external beauty of form and melody. We never tire of admiring its gems of poetic diction and exquisite workmanship. But to the generation who first read it *The Demon* offered a deeper interest. The Demon, though a familiar fledgling of the “eagle brood” of Western romanticism, was new to Russia, and at the time of his appearance only a minority of the Russian public had outgrown their romantic tastes. Poushkin, as we have seen, lost some of his hold upon society when he passed through his most subjective and romantic phase; only a very few critics understood the realistic tendencies of Poushkin and Gogol. Therefore there was still a public for Lermontov’s poem, although from a social point of view it seems a retrograde step from the works of these two writers.

Kotliarevsky analyses Lermontov’s poem and the “demon-hero” in general as follows :—

“In spite of certain attractive qualities, his character is that of an egotist. The consciousness of his own power and the loftiness of his

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aspirations tend to decrease in the eyes of such a man the value—whatever it may be—of any sacrifice made for him by others. The keenness and depth of his own sufferings cause him to look coolly on those of his fellows, especially if their sufferings do not fill so lofty a circle of thought and emotion as his own. Meeting a weaker nature, the demon absorbs its personality, almost involuntarily, and becomes the source of its moral anguish ; because the stronger spirit makes demands which the weaker cannot answer. That is why vital contact with such 'demonic' spirits costs dear to ordinary mortals, above all to women. The social movement which created the man-demon awoke also in the hearts of women the thirst for freedom and equality. Such counterparts exist in the novels of Madame de Stael and George Sand. But these strong women are in the minority as compared to the men-demons, who, never finding their counterpart, must needs content themselves with tender, affectionate, but shallow, feminine natures. Thence proceeds the dramatic conflict between the 'man-demon' and the 'woman-angel'—a contrast we observe as the mainspring of all the poems and novels at the beginning of the nineteenth century. . . . None of the heroes of the pre-revolutionary epoch have any demoniac features in their character. There is no place for Satan in their hearts. . . . Thus the whole aim and end of the demon-type

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was to reflect vital social truths—perhaps with some exaggeration, but fundamentally to give a real and accurate picture. The ideas and emotions experienced by these ‘demon’ men and women were shared by all Europe and also by our own parents.”

Lermontov was true to his period and his country when he drew Tamara as the loving, self-sacrificing, weak type of womanhood. Russian literature, which had borrowed so many things from the West, including the demon-hero of poetry and fiction, had not as yet adopted the emancipated heroine, the Lélias and Corinnes of George Sand and Madame de Staél. They existed neither in the life nor the literature of Russia when Lermontov wrote. Tatiana, in most respects typically Russian, has still a certain affinity to the women of the eighteenth-century novel. Like Richardson’s heroines, she “points the moral and adorns the tale.”

This analysis of *The Demon* helps to interpret the prevailing mood of a large proportion of Lermontov’s subsequent work.

The poet was early attracted to the drama, and his first play, a romantic tragedy, *The Spaniard*, dates as far back as 1831. It is not a work of much originality or vitality, but shows a certain skill in the handling of a plot and a feeling for effect. But Lermontov’s genius was, at almost any period

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of his life, too subjective to adapt itself to the composition of a good, well-balanced play. His were invariably "one-man" pieces, in which the hero loomed large from the rise to the fall of the curtain, and all the other characters simply revolved round him, dim and lustreless satellites. It is from his own emotions and experience that Lermontov draws his dramatic heroes.

Arbenin, in *A Queer Man*, is estranged from his father by pity for a dying mother. In a later play, *The Two Brothers*, the hero, Radin, is a more developed character, but still recalls Lermontov himself. Radin has cast off all ties of family affection. He quarrels with his father from jealousy of his younger brother, who is also his rival in love. In Pechorin, the chief character in Lermontov's novel *A Hero of our Day*, this isolation of spirit reaches its extreme limit. In all the plays the leading motive is the conflict between ideal aspirations and the contact with reality. The hero, a youthful and ardent idealist, invariably passes through the crucible of experience and emerges a cold, supercilious egotist.

This pessimistic and negative spirit is never more apparent than in Lermontov's treatment of his love episodes. He sketches many triumphant lovers—he himself appears to have been superficially irresistible to women—but not a single happy one. This was natural enough, viewed in

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the light of his personal experiences. Theoretically Lermontov believed in love as the great consoling and regenerating influence in life. It never lost its attraction for him, and, in spite of bitter disenchantment, his temperament left him continually at the mercy of his passions. Yet not one of his many love affairs brought satisfaction to his craving heart; for his merciless analytical brain followed close on the impulse of his emotions and invariably undid the work of his heart. In love, as in other matters, he yearned for the impossible. Throughout his life he was in love with some dream-woman whom he never met in the flesh. Hence the unsympathetic attitude of his heroes towards the other sex, whom they first hailed as angels of consolation, and afterwards abandoned at the least hint of discrepancy between the ideal and the real.

If love brought him no lasting consolation, still less did religion. What, outside the Book of Ecclesiastes, breathes more hopeless sadness than the dying words of one of his heroes to the woman he loved? “My dear, there is no other world—only chaos. It will extinguish all passion . . . and into chaos we shall disappear. We shall never meet again. There is neither Heaven nor Hell. We are shelterless creatures—the flotsam of creation.” And it is remarkable that with perhaps the sole exception of the little lyrical gem “When thy loved voice I hear,” there is

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not a single love poem the rapture of which is not overshadowed by some *arrière pensée*.

*Mtsieri* was written many years after the first sketch of *The Demon*, and reflects the moods and experiences of Lermontov's later years, just as the latter resumes those of his youth. But it does not show any radical change in his outlook. The hero of the poem is a young Circassian mountaineer taken captive in his childhood and immured during his adolescence within the walls of an Orthodox monastery. The sole joy of his monotonous life is the memory of his childish freedom. Thrown in upon himself, he grows reserved and sad as a captive eagle. He is haunted by dreams of heroic deeds and of love, of which he ignores the actuality. Putting aside the monastic setting, here we have the poet's own youth brought clearly before us. At last the wild bird breaks out of his cage and flies, without definite aim or hope, back to his unforget-  
gotten mountains. At first he is intoxicated with the mere joy of freedom. The scene in which *Mtsieri* is attacked by a panther, and exults to feel all the wild primitive instincts of his race surge up in his heart, is very finely sketched:—

Swiftly within my heart  
Blazed up the fierce desire for blood and conflict,  
And well I knew though fate had set my feet  
In other ways, that in my native land  
I should not prove the weakest warrior there.

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But the bird's wings had been too long clipped. Mtsieri had the instincts, but not the habits, of a mountaineer. He loses his way, falls exhausted, and is found on the mountain-side by the monks, who carry him back to die in the monastery. What has he gained by his adventure? A vision of love as he lay asleep on the mountains; one brief intoxicating experience of combat; disappointment and death, but, above all, three days' glorious liberty. Always the same old themes, which appealed so directly to the young Russians of Lermontov's day, of liberties curtailed, of energies stifled, of aspirations blighted.

Although it does not come under the category of poetry, it is impossible to pass over in silence Lermontov's *magnum opus*—the novel *A Hero of our Day*. In its chief character, Pechorin, we reach the last development of that romantic type which is inextricably bound up with the poet's own personality. His outward presentment stamps him as one of the "eagle brood" or demon spawn. Pechorin is broad-shouldered, well-knit, able to withstand both the fatigues and emotional ravages of a life of pleasure and the hardships of the chase. His skin has something of the delicacy and fine texture of a woman's. The contrast of his fair hair with his very dark eyebrows and moustache must have been sufficiently startling. His eyes never smile in

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response to his lips—"a sign of a bad disposition, or of some profound perpetual sorrow." His eyes had also a phosphorescent gleam—very demoniac this—which was neither the reflection of a fiery temperament, nor yet the play of fancy; it was "the flash of polished steel; cutting, but cold." Bielinsky has said of Pechorin that, not understanding himself, he is often his own worst interpreter. Undoubtedly if we take him at his own valuation Pechorin appears at first sight merely an unfeeling and capricious egotist. As we follow his story, the complexity and the inconsistency of the man become more distinctly apparent. Pechorin has long puzzled the critics, who see in him now a type of "advanced" intellectual man, now a mere dandy pursuing his aimless way through the world. The truth is that the hero reflects the duality of his author. But of the twin souls which dwell within him, it is the darkened spirit that is most in evidence. "I regard the sufferings and joys of others simply as they affect myself, as the food which sustains my intellectual forces," says this egotist in love and cynic in friendship. The better side of his nature is shown in his brief but sincere moods of tenderness and his fine feeling for all that is sublime in nature. With such emotional capacities and keen appreciation of the beautiful, we cannot help suspecting that Pechorin's apparent insensibility is only a mask to hide the working of his intimate feelings.

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The setting of the novel is the grand scenery and free life of the Caucasus. The Circassians whom Lermontov has depicted in their own surroundings are not less convincing, and far more sympathetic, than his types of civilised society. In the rough, honest soldier Maxime Maximovich, Lermontov has proved that he could on occasion draw a purely objective character with no mean skill. Pechorin deserts Vera his Russian love for the beautiful Georgian girl Bela, in whose untutored passion and unstinted devotion he believes he has found the ideal love. In spite of his "vampire theories" about sustaining himself upon the emotions and sufferings of others, Pechorin at first gives a very real and human passion to the girl he has carried away from her natural surroundings. But, as usual, mental analysis proves fatal to emotion. "I am again mistaken," he says, when the first triumph of possession begins to wane; "the love of a savage is only a degree better than that of an educated woman." On such reflections, disenchantment and desertion inevitably follow, and we agree with simple and affectionate Maxim Maximovich that Bela's tragic end was a mercy in disguise. All the women who come in contact with this Demon-hero pay the penalty of his fascination. Vera is cruelly punished, the life of the Princess Marie is almost ruined for his sake, and Bela, the woman who loved him best of all, dies the victim of a selfish trick which—in order

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to gain her—he has played upon a revengeful Circassian.

But Pechorin arrives at a stage of spiritual evolution far beyond that of the Demon, or Radin, or any of Lermontov's earlier heroes. On the eve of the duel in which he loses his life he leaves the following confession :—

“ I review all my past, and involuntarily ask myself: Why have I lived? To what end was I born? In truth some end existed. And I think my destiny was lofty, because I have felt the infinite forces of the spirit move within me. But I never divined this destiny. I was attracted by the marsh-lights of vain and ungrateful passions. I came forth from their furnace hard and cold as iron, but having lost the flame of noble aspiration, which is the perfect flower of life. My love never brought happiness, because I sacrificed nothing for those whom I loved ; I loved for my own pleasure ; for the mere satisfaction of a strange craving of my heart. I drank up all the emotions of others: their tenderness, their joys, their sufferings ; but my thirst was never quenched.”

Here Lermontov seems to have succeeded for the first time in diagnosing the cause of his own malady. Whether he might have acted physician to his own soul and, by pulling down the barriers of his self-centred individuality, have reconciled

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himself with the wider life of humanity, the time left to him was too short to prove. There are signs, however, that his scepticism might have given way to socialism in the highest sense of the word. Probably *A Hero of our Day* was merely intended as a chapter in that great novel of contemporary Russian life which Lermontov actually projected. But in the two years that followed between its publication and the poet's death no further instalments were forthcoming.

*A Hero of our Day* appealed to the generation for which he was created, but must always remain the representative of an individual, rather than a collective type. Comparison between Onegin and Pechorin seems inevitable, although the bond of union between them is not very close. Onegin was true to the period of Alexander I, which produced such self-sufficient and prosaic types of dandyism as the man who blighted Tatiana's innocent hopes and affections. Onegin's views of life, limited as they were, were formed, and incapable of modification. Pechorin belongs to a later and more progressive type. Onegin is stationary; Pechorin is in process of evolution. Their difference is not wholly that of time and place, but also of temperament. "Onegin," says Kotliarevsky, "with all his surface wit, is too much the slave of his passions. Pechorin, with a far more passionate nature, is too much the slave of his intellect."

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In summing up the influence of Lermontov's poetry, we observe that, while his popularity has suffered many fluctuations, he has never been the cause of so many party disputes as Poushkin. Lermontov had no definite philosophy of life, and no programme of social convictions. He undoubtedly belongs in the main to the progressive movement, but is useless as the mouthpiece of party politics ; and the sole attempt to put him forward as the possible poet of Slavophilism must be considered a failure. The negative quality of his poetry has limited its influence in certain directions, and from the æsthetic standpoint this has been a decided advantage. But the tide of his popularity would seem to have obeyed some settled law of ebb and flow. Whenever Russian society has been busy with positive ideals, the tide of Lermontov's influence has ebbed to its lowest, to flow back again with the reaction which has usually followed these periods of reconstructive zeal. He is the poet who appeals most to men in their hour of perplexity and discord, when the harmony between the ideal and the actual seems strained beyond hope of reconciliation.

Of late years some of the peculiar notes of Lermontov's lyre have sounded in the work of a few of the younger Russian singers. They might do worse than re-echo his lofty idealism, his fearless expression of opinion, and the sincerity in the cause of liberty—if only of individual

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liberty—which is in healthy contrast to the pose adopted by some of the “socialist” poets who followed him. While for the clear, penetrative radiance and flaming quality of his poetic fire, a nation might wait long before seeing again another such beacon flash “a watch of light and warmth” into the darkness of the night.

## VERSES FROM POUSHKIN AND LERMONTOV

### POUSHKIN

#### THE BLACK SHAWL

As of senses bereft, at a black shawl I stare,  
And my chill heart is tortured with deadly despair.

When dreaming too fondly in credulous youth,  
I loved a Greek maiden with passion and truth.

My Greek girl was gentle and loving and fair ;  
But my joy quickly sank in a day of despair.

Once I feasted gay friends ; ere the banquet was  
o'er

A Jew, the accursed, softly knocked at my door.

“ Thou art laughing,” he whispered, “ in pleasure's  
mad whirl ;

But she hath betrayed thee, thy young Grecian  
girl.”

I cursed him ; but gold as a guerdon I gave,  
And took as companion my trustiest slave.

My swift charger I mounted ; at once we depart,  
And the soft voice of pity was stilled in my heart.

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The Greek maiden's dwelling I hardly could  
mark,

For my limbs they grew faint, and my eyes they  
grew dark.

I silently entered—alone and amazed ;  
An Armenian was kissing the girl as I gazed.

I saw not the light ; but I seized my good blade ;  
The betrayer ne'er finished the kiss that betrayed.

On his warm, headless body I trampled, then  
spurn'd,

And silent and pale to the maiden I turned.

I remember her prayers—in her blood how she  
strove ;

Then perished my Greek girl—then perished my  
love.

I tore the black shawl from her head as she lay,  
Wiped the blood-dripping weapon, and hurried  
away.

When the mists of the evening rose gloomy, my  
slave

Threw each corpse in the Danube's dark fast-  
rolling wave.

Since then no bewildering eyes can delight ;  
Since then I forbear festive banquets at night.

As of senses bereft, at a black shawl I stare,  
And my chill heart is tortured with deadly  
despair.

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### THE UPAS TREE

Amid the desert bare and scant,  
On soil on which fierce suns are glaring,  
The upas like a watchman gaunt  
Stands lonely, none its silence sharing.

Nature amid the steppes, I ween,  
In fit of wrath the tree created,  
And gave each branch its sickly green,  
Each root with poison saturated.

The liquid trickles through the bark,  
Its flow the midday sunshine quickens,  
And in night's shadows dull and dark,  
A resinous gum, the venom, thickens.

Hither no bird its passage knows,  
No tiger seeks such loathsome dwelling,  
Only the baleful whirlwind blows  
And spreads with festering virus swelling.

And if a cloud should chance bedew  
Its pale crown, where the thick leaves wreath it—  
So from the branch of dolorous hue  
Falls poison in the sand beneath it.

A tyrant sent his fellow-man  
Drops from the poisonous tree to borrow,  
And the poor slave obedient ran  
And came back with the juice the morrow.

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He brought and sickened straight with it,  
On his poor mat crush'd by disaster ;  
Then groaned, expiring at the feet  
Of his relentless, ruthless master.

But joy was his—that savage king—  
In the fell juice his shafts he steepeth  
All round their poisonous force they fling ;  
Earth groans, for corpse on corpse he heapeth.

*Translated by W. R. Morfill.*

### TO A. P. KERN

I mind me still of that strange meeting  
When thou didst pass before my sight—  
A momentary vision fleeting,  
A spirit pure and blest and bright.

By sorrow hopelessly surrounded,  
To me amid life's tumults vain,  
Thy tender voice still softly sounded,  
Thy heavenly features smiled again.

Years fled : the blast beat on me killing  
The proud thoughts I had fondly nursed,  
And I forgot thine accents thrilling,  
That heavenly gaze that met me first.

In gloom—in fancy's isolation  
My days dragged on their calm despair ;  
Nor deity, nor inspiration,  
Nor tears, nor life, nor love were there.

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But wakes my soul when at our meeting  
Again thou art before my sight,  
A momentary vision fleeting,  
A spirit pure and blest and bright.

And beats my heart with exultation,  
And hopes again have shown them fair,  
And deity and inspiration  
And tears and life and love are there.

*Translated by W. R. Morfill.*

## THE TALISMAN

Where the sea for ever dashes  
Wave 'gainst lonely rock and tower ;  
Where the moonbeam softly flashes  
At the evening's misty hour.  
Slave to harem-beauties' graces,  
Where the Moslem wastes life's span ;  
There a sorceress, with embraces,  
Gave to me a talisman.

And "O keep this secret treasure,"  
Thus with kisses she began :  
'Tis a spell of wondrous measure,  
'Tis love's gift, my talisman.  
From the pain, the death thou fearest,  
In the storm and hurricane ;  
Not, I trow, from these, my dearest,  
Guard thee shall my talisman.

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'Twill not give thee jewels hidden,  
Which the Eastern mines can show ;  
'Twill not 'neath thy falchion bidden  
Lay the Prophet's votaries low ;  
'Twill not bring thy friend beside thee,  
Nor, when sad in exile's ban,  
To thy northern country guide thee  
From the south, my talisman.

But when subtle eyes would move thee,  
Luring thee with sudden power,  
When the lips that do not love thee  
Dare to kiss at evening hour,  
Love, from that unmindful season—  
New heart sorrows that unman—  
Falsehood, trespasses, and treason  
Shall protect my talisman.

*Translated by W. R. Morfill.*

### THE HIGH ROAD IN WINTER

Between the rolling vapours  
The moon glides soft and bright ;  
Across the dreary fallows  
She casts a mournful light.

Along the wintry high road  
A *troïka* moves fleet ;  
Its little bells are ringing  
One silver tone and sweet.

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Some echo of my country  
The driver's song recalls—  
The memory of love yearnings  
And noisy bacchanals.

No lights, no black-roofed dwellings—  
Silence and snow . . . I see  
For mile on mile the road-posts  
In striped<sup>1</sup> monotony.

*Translated by Rosa Newmarch.*

## THE ROUSSALKA

### A LEGEND OF THE WATER-SPRITE

In forest depths, beside a mere,  
A monk once made his habitation ;  
Absorbed in penances severe,  
In fast and prayer he sought salvation.  
Already by his own poor spade  
His grave was hollowed to receive him,  
And every day the good saint prayed  
That Heaven from earth would soon relieve him.

One summer's eve, the hermit poor,  
At prayer within his narrow room,  
Looked out beyond his humble door  
And saw the forest wrapped in gloom ;

<sup>1</sup> The boundary-posts in Russia are painted in stripes of black and white.

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Night-mists were rising from the mere,  
Between the clouds the moon 'gan peep ;  
The monk unto the pool drew near  
And gazed into its waters deep.

He saw himself—drew back perturbed  
By fears he ne'er had known before ;  
For, lo, the waters were disturbed,  
Then suddenly grew calm once more ;  
While fitful as a twilight shade,  
Than virgin snow more purely white,  
From out the pool appeared a maid  
Approaching in the silver light.

She shook the bright drops from her hair  
And gazed upon the anchorite ;  
To look upon her form so fair  
The good monk trembled with affright.  
And he beheld her from afar  
With head and hand strange signals make,  
Then swifter than a shooting star  
Dive back into the silent lake.

All night the hermit could not sleep,  
All day in agony he prayed ;  
But still he could not choose but keep  
The image of that wondrous maid  
Before him. So, when day did wane,  
And overhead the moon was bright,  
He watched, and saw her come again  
In all her beauty, dazzling white.

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She beckoned to him where he stood,  
And gave him greeting glad and free.  
She played and splashed about the flood,  
She laughed and danced in childish glee,  
As softly to the monk she cried :  
“ Come hither, monk, and join me here ! ”  
Then suddenly she dipped to hide  
Her beauty in the darkling mere.

The third day came—grown mad with love,  
The hermit sought th’ enchanted shore  
Ere yet night’s veil was drawn above,  
And waited for the maid once more.  
Dawn broke—the monk had disappeared . . .  
And now the frightened children say  
He haunts the pool : and lo ! his beard  
Floats on the water night and day.

*Translated by Rosa Newmarch.*

## EASTERN SONG

I think that thou wert born for this—  
To set the poet’s vision burning,  
To hold him in a trance of bliss,  
And by sweet words to wake his yearning :  
To charm him by those eyes that shine,  
By that strange Eastern speech of thine,  
And by thy feet—those tiny treasures !  
Ah ! thou wert born for languid pleasures  
And glowing hours of bliss divine !

*Translated by Rosa Newmarch.*

# The Romantic Poets

## TATIANA'S LETTER FROM "EUGENE ONIEGIN"

I write to you . . . when that is said  
What more is left for me to say?  
Now you are free (I know too well)  
To heap contempt upon my head.  
Yet if some sparks of pity dwell  
Within your breast you'll surely not  
Abandon me to my hard lot.  
When first I saw you I desired  
To hold my peace : my shame ('tis true)  
Would ne'er have been revealed to you  
Had life's conditions but inspired  
One gleam of hope that you would come  
To see us in our country home  
From time to time, so that I might  
Hear but one word, catch but one tone,  
And live by dreaming on alone  
Till our next meeting, day and night.  
But then it seemed there was no hope ;  
Our rustic quiet bored you so,  
Folk said you were a misanthrope ;  
And we—we do not make a show—  
You found us narrow in our scope.

Why did you come to visit us  
In this forgotten quiet place?  
I need not have been tortured thus  
If I had never seen your face.

## Poetry and Progress in Russia

My inexperienced heart maybe  
Had grown resigned to this dull life,  
And future years had brought to me  
Some other love—my destiny  
An honoured mother and true wife.  
Another's! Nay, to none on earth  
Could I have given this heart of mine.  
By the decree of the Most High,  
And by Heaven's willing, I am thine.

Allotted unto you was I  
E'en from the moment of my birth  
And loyal to my future fate;  
And God, I know, sent you to be  
My champion and my advocate  
Till the grave closes over me. . . .

Oft in my dreams you did appear;  
I loved you then before the days  
When palpably I saw you here;  
I languished in your wondrous gaze  
And in my heart your voice rang clear  
Long since. . . . It was no dream to me!  
You came—at once I understood  
This swift confusion in my blood,  
While my thoughts whispered: "Lo, 'tis he."  
Was it not true? Am I not sure  
You spoke with me in hours of peace  
When I went visiting my poor,  
Or when I strove by prayer to ease  
The pain in which my spirit toss'd?

## The Romantic Poets

Was not your image wont to rise  
A vision sweet—too quickly lost—  
To light my gloom? Did not mine eyes  
See you bend gently o'er my bed?  
Were not some words low whisperèd  
Of love and hope? Now in what guise  
Come you? As guardian angel good,  
Or tempter in some wily mood?  
O speak, and set my doubts at rest!  
What if all this should prove at best  
The empty dream, more light than froth,  
Of a heart simple and untried?  
Well, be it so! But from henceforth  
I must to you my fate confide.  
Must weep my tears about your feet  
And for your sheltering love entreat.  
Picture me now. . . . I sit alone  
With none to heed or guess what ails . . .  
And now my very reason fails!  
I wait for you. One glance of yours  
Fresh hope unto my heart restores;  
Or else the cruel dream comes back  
Of merited contempt. . . . Alack!

[*She seals the letter.*

'Tis done! I scarce dare read it through,  
But overcome with shame and fright  
I trust my honour now to you,  
And dare to think I trust aright.

*Translated by Rosa Newmarch.*

# Poetry and Progress in Russia

## THE DUEL FROM "EUGENE ONIEGIN"

28

Yes, foes!—How many days, bethink you,  
Since hatred stepped the two between,  
And since in hours of thought and leisure,  
At work, at table, they have been  
As comrades! Now, with purpose dread,  
Like men in mutual loathing bred,  
Each plans, as though in broadest day  
A heavy nightmare on him lay,  
The other's downfall in his heart.  
Oh, could they smile but once, while still  
Their hands are pure from deed of ill,  
And then their sev'ral ways depart!  
But worldly hate, like worldly fame,  
Shrinks at the breath of worldly shame.

29

30

—Now, come together!

Calmly, coldly,  
Not aiming yet, with haughty glance,  
And tread assured and light, though measured,  
The combatants four steps advance,  
Four steps to death—whereon Eugene,  
Still forward moving o'er the green,

124

## The Romantic Poets

(The other likewise) first began  
To raise his weapon, fix his man. . . .  
Nine steps now of the fateful quest  
Were counted—Lensky, with a frown,  
His left eye closed, took aim—when down  
Oniégine's thumb the trigger prest. . . .  
Reverse the sand-glass!—Lensky sighed—  
No more!—and let his pistol glide.

31

He sought his breast with clutching fingers—  
He fell, his glance grew dim, and still  
It spoke of death alone, not torment,  
As when upon some eastern hill  
All sparkling in the morning light,  
The snow-wreath vanishes from sight.  
Oniégine, suddenly a-cold  
With horror, saw his shot had told.  
He hastened—o'er the poet's form  
He stooped, he called his name—too late!  
He was no more—untimely fate!  
The flower had perished in the storm—  
The music on the broken lyre,  
And on the altar-stone, the fire!

32

And there he lay! How unfamiliar  
Upon his brow the languid grace!  
Beneath his breast the ball had pierced him,  
The smoking blood ran down apace,  
Thence, where, a few brief moments past,

## Poetry and Progress in Russia

The pulse of life was bounding fast,  
Where hate and hope and love were strong,  
And warm emotions wont to throng.  
The heart is now a house bereft  
Of former inmates—every floor  
Is dark and still for evermore,  
With dusty panes. The host has left ;  
And whither went he ? Who shall say ?  
His very trace is swept away.

### 33

To write an epigram, a sharp one,  
Your stupid foe to irritate,  
Is very nice. To see him lower  
His sullen horns, still obstinate,  
And, *nolens volens*, in the glass  
With shame behold himself and pass.  
'Twere nicer still (the fool !), should he  
Stand there and gape—“ 'Tis meant for me ! ”  
And silently to dig your foe  
An honoured grave, to aim with care—  
Your mark, the pallid forehead there,  
A generous distance off—we know,  
Is nicest. But to see him fall  
And lie, is scarcely nice at all !

### 34

We'll just suppose, my friend, your pistol  
Has stretched a young acquaintance dead—  
Because of forward look or answer,

## The Romantic Poets

Because some idle thing he said  
Had stung you o'er the wine last night,  
Or even called you out to fight  
Himself in boyish anger—well,  
What kind of feeling, pray you, tell,  
Came o'er you with a whelming rush,  
When laid before you on the ground,  
Without a motion or a sound,  
He stiffens in the sudden hush ?  
When dumb, with blinded stare, he lies,  
Stone-deaf to your despairing cries ?

*Translated by H. C. F.*

### LERMONTOV

#### A PALM BRANCH FROM PALESTINE

Branch of palm from Palestine,  
Tell me of thy native place :  
What fair vale, what steep incline,  
First thy stately growth did grace ?

Has the sun at dawn caressed thee,  
That on Jordan's waters shone,  
Have the rough night-winds distressed thee  
As they swept o'er Lebanon ?

And while Solym's sons, brought low,  
Plaited thee for humble wages,  
Was it prayer they chanted slow,  
Or some song of ancient ages ?

## Poetry and Progress in Russia

As in childhood's first awaking  
Does thy parent-tree still stand,  
With its full-leaved branches making  
Shadows on the burning sand?

Or when thou from it wert riven,  
Did it straightway droop and die,  
Till the desert dust was driven  
On its yellowing leaves to die?

Say, what pilgrim's pious hand  
Cherished thee in hours of pain,  
When he to this northern land  
Brought thee, fed with tears like rain?

Or perchance on some good knight,  
Pure in heart and calm of vision,  
Men bestowed thy garland bright—  
Fit as he for realms Elysian?

Now preserved with reverent care,  
At the *Ikon*'s gilded shrine,  
Faithful watch thou keepest there,  
Holy Palm of Palestine.

Where the lamp burns faint and dim,  
Folded in a mystic calm,  
Near the Cross—the sign of Him—  
Rest in safety, sacred Palm.

*Translated by Rosa Newmarch.*

# The Romantic Poets

## LINES TO —

When thy loved voice I hear,  
At those tones sweet and clear  
My heart leaps madly  
Like some poor captive bird.  
And when I meet thine eyes—  
More blue than summer skies—  
My spirit at thy word  
Leaps forward gladly.  
Sweetest of all delight  
The hour of our meeting ;  
Love, if only I might  
Clasp thee in greeting !

*Translated by Rosa Newmarch.*

## THE DREAM

At noon, in the valley of far Daghestan,  
With a ball in my breast I lay silent and stark,  
While drop by drop, slowly, the red life-blood ran  
From the still smoking wound that showed hollow  
and dark.

Alone I lay there on the bare sandy ground.  
The fierce sun of noontide was scorching the  
steep  
Brown crests of the mountains that hemmed me  
around,  
And it fell on me too—but I slept the death-sleep.

## Poetry and Progress in Russia

And I dreamt of my country ; of revels by night,  
Of halls that were brilliant with cressets aflame ;  
Of maidens whose chaplets of roses gleamed  
bright,

And amid their gay gossip I heard my own name.

But one of the maidens sits pensive apart,  
Nor joins in the laughter : and God alone knows  
What sinister fancies engulf her young heart,  
So silent she sits while the revelry grows.

Does she see in her vision the corpse of a man  
With a ball in his breast, lying silent and stark  
At noon, in the valley of far Daghestan,  
While the still smoking wound with his life-blood  
is dark ?

*Translated by Rosa Newmarch.*

## CIRCASSIAN SONG

With fair maids our mountains teem ;  
In their dark eyes star-sparks gleam ;  
Life with them may envied be,  
Sweeter still is liberty.

Never take a wife, lad,  
To my words give heed ;  
Save your money up, lad,  
To buy yourself a steed !

## The Romantic Poets

He who takes a wife, too late  
Finds he chose a sorry fate.  
No more 'gainst Russian foes he'll fight !  
Why?—lest his wife should weep with fright !

Never take a wife, lad,  
To my words give heed ;  
Save your money up, lad,  
To buy yourself a steed !

He has no inconstant mood,  
Bears you well through fire and flood,  
Sweeps the wild steppe like the wind,  
Brings far things near—leaves all behind.

Never take a wife, lad,  
To my words give heed ;  
Save your money up, lad,  
To buy yourself a steed !

*Translated by Rosa Newmarch.*

### THE NUN'S SONG

FROM "THE DEMON"

As flits a sail across th' eternal sea,  
As shines a golden star at eventide,  
So came an angel visitant to me,  
And deathless shall his memory abide.  
Came he for others, or for me alone ?  
I cannot guess ; but this I know full well—

## Poetry and Progress in Russia

If it were but a dream that's come and gone,  
Then in such dreams let me for ever dwell !  
Thou knowest, great Creator, all my past  
Was given to Thee—e'en from my childhood's  
days ;  
But now my troubled soul perceives at last  
That Thou wouldest have me walk in other ways.  
I cannot think that I may be to blame ;  
My love is like my angel—wholly pure—  
Nor am I tortured by an earthly flame  
Which might my perfect thoughts of Thee obscure.  
For he reflects Thy glory on that brow  
Where Thou hast bid ennobling grace to live.  
That one brief hour with him—I would not now  
Exchange for all Eternity can give.

Sweet was the dream, and dear,  
Which brought his presence near,  
He who has proved alway  
Hope's Star, whose beacon-ray  
O'er that far Land doth glow.

Dear God above,  
How shall my love  
Prove in Thy sight accurst,  
Who from the first  
Ordained it so ?

*Translated by Rosa Newmarch.*

# The Romantic Poets

## THE DESERTER

### A LEGEND OF THE CAUCASUS

Haroun ran swifter than the hare or deer,  
His pace outstripped the very eagle's flight,  
When, overcome by sudden, craven fear,  
He left behind the gory field of fight,  
Where many a brave Circassian bled and died.  
That day his father and his brethren twain  
For fame and liberty had perished there,  
And underneath a pile of their own slain  
Lay in the dust, with drabbled, matted hair,  
While all their gaping wounds for vengeance cried.  
Then suddenly, to shame and duty dead,  
Haroun had flung both sword and gun aside,  
And basely from the scene of carnage fled.  
The daylight waned and died; the white mist rolled  
Across the darkened fields, and fold on fold  
Spread onward, shroud-like, upon either hand;  
The evening breeze from out the east blew cold,  
While o'er the plain—above the Prophet's land—  
The round moon hung, a disc of burnished gold.  
Outworn and languid, sore athirst, his face  
Disfigured by the battle's smoke and stain,  
Haroun beheld by moonlight once again,  
Perch'd high among the crags, his native place.  
No human eye his furtive steps might mark;  
The village in a pallid light was bathed;  
None stirred; for all its sons were lying stark,  
Save Haroun, who was creeping home unscathed.

## Poetry and Progress in Russia

Lo ! Haroun sought a well-known cabin where  
The lamp proclaimed the master still was there.  
He paused to steel his conscience for the meeting,  
Then entered : Selim gave him friendly greeting.  
At first he did not recognise the guest ;  
Stretched on a bed of torture and unrest,  
The old man lay and suffered silently.  
“ Now praise to Allah, who hath rescued thee,  
And praise his holy angels, who o'ercame  
The ruthless foe, and saved thee for fresh fame !  
What news ? ” Thus Selim spake with labour'd  
breath,  
But in his eyes hope's fires blazed up anew,  
While all his warrior-blood rush'd coursing through  
His veins, grown stagnant in the frosts of death.  
And Haroun : “ Two whole days we fought, nor  
ceased,  
And in the Pass my brothers fell and died  
Beside my father ; then like some wild beast  
I crept into the wilderness to hide,  
And there, among the bushes, all alone  
I dragged my bleeding feet o'er sand and stone,  
And save for tracks of boars and wolves, no guide  
In all my weary wanderings I found.  
Circassia's sons were crushed : the foe all round.  
Now give me shelter, friend, and hear mine oath :  
“ *Lo, by the Prophet I will be thy slave,  
And cherish gratitude e'en to the grave.* ”  
He spoke ; but straight the dying man in wrath  
Replied : “ Begone, and take my scorn with thee ! ”

## The Romantic Poets

'Tis well-deserved. No hospitality,  
Nor any blessing have I to dispense  
To traitors like thyself. Go—get thee hence!"  
Then Haroun turned in silence to depart ;  
Though shame and secret anguish filled his heart,  
He found no words to speak in self-defence ;  
But as he closed th' inhospitable door,  
He paused a moment, for a dream of yore  
Came floating through his brain ; a maiden's kiss  
Upon his icy forehead seemed to burn ;  
Once more the light and warmth of former bliss  
Within his darkened soul made Paradise,  
While through the gloom he thought he could  
discern

The liquid fires of bright and tender eyes.  
The thought flashed through him : "Once I was  
her lover,  
Now she must live and sigh alone—'tis over."  
He stood in doubt, his hand upon the latch . . .  
What voice was that? . . . He strained his ear  
to catch  
Old Selim's singing ; at that well-known tune  
Haroun grew whiter than the pallid moon.

### SELIM'S SONG

On high the moon's light  
Shines peaceful, but sad,  
The brave soldier lad  
Must away to the fight.

## Poetry and Progress in Russia

He's loaded his musket and sharpened his blade  
And farewell to her horseman now speaks the  
fair maid.

“ My sweetheart must go,  
Be brave, love, and know  
For thy fate no alarm ;  
Thou needst fear nothing of it  
If thou pray'st to the Prophet  
To keep thee from harm.  
With the Prophet keep faith,  
But still more with thy name,  
Who fights not till death  
Is a traitor to fame,  
No glory he gains.  
Nor rivers nor rains  
Wash out perfidy's stains ;  
The earth will not cover  
From wild beasts that hover  
A traitor's remains.  
Ah, no mountaineer  
With such shame would be laden,  
He would shrink from the sneer  
Of his fair mountain maiden.”

Then Haroun, goaded by his soul's unrest,  
Pursued his way in haste, with lowered head,  
And ever and anon the tears he shed  
Slipped from his lids and burned upon his breast.  
But, lo, amid the tempest of his shame,  
While hastening onward through the gloom, he  
came

## The Romantic Poets

Upon the white walls of the little house  
Where he was born : the sight had power to  
rouse

New hopes within him. Creeping unaware  
He reached the lattice just as one fond prayer  
For Haroun's safety up to Heaven had flown  
From his old mother's lips, who waited there  
Her boy's return—ah, God, but not alone !  
“ Now, mother, open to me ; faint, outworn,  
It is thy Haroun knocks, thy youngest born,  
Who safely through the rain of Russian fire  
Comes back to thee.” . . .

“ Alone ? ”

“ Aye.”

“ And thy sire ? ”

And thy two brethren ? ”—“ Slain before mine  
eyes.

The Holy Prophet bless their happier lot  
And angels bear their souls to Paradise.”  
“ Didst thou avenge them ? ”

“ Nay, I tarried not,

But to the mountains like an arrow, shot  
By some strong marksman, took my way full speed,  
And left my sword there in the stranger's land  
That I might reach thee sooner in thy need,  
And wipe away thy tears with filial hand.”

“ Hush, giaour, subtle-tongued, nor waste a lie !  
For since thou daredst not like a hero die,  
Go hence and dwell in solitude apart !  
Not with thy shame—deserter as thou art—

## Poetry and Progress in Russia

Will I embitter all my life's decline. . . .  
Thou slave—thou coward—but no son of mine!"  
Thus through the sleeping village every word  
Rang clearly forth in stern denunciation.  
But underneath the window long were heard  
The sounds of cursing and of lamentation . . .  
Then one groan as the poniard-stroke descended—  
And, lo, for Haroun life and shame were ended.  
At dawn his mother saw him where he died,  
And from the vision coldly turned aside.  
He might not rest within the burial-ground ;  
His corpse by all the faithful was ignored  
And left where every straying village hound  
Might lap the blood that from his death-wound  
        poured.  
And e'en the children, pausing in their play,  
Would point with scorn and mock his senseless  
        clay ;  
While evermore tradition shall recall  
This story of a coward's shame and fall.  
And still his spirit, striving to evade  
The Prophet's eye, flits homeless, chas'd by fear ;  
And on the Eastern mountains, Haroun's shade  
Until this day, at nightfall doth appear  
And walks till dawn ; then at the window-pane  
Of some familiar hut he knocks again ;  
But if within a loud voice he should hear  
Read from the Koran, he will flee as fast  
As once he fled, dishonoured, in the past.

*Translated by Rosa Newmarch.*



KOLTSOV



## THE POPULAR POETS

### KOLTSOV

**I**T is a remarkable fact in the history of Russian literature that the appearance of a great poetic light among the educated classes has been almost immediately followed by the rise of a lesser luminary among the illiterate masses. Thus—to take the two most striking instances—the brilliant dawn of Poushkin's poetry awoke a responsive glow in the remote provinces, and inspired the songs of Koltsov, a young cattle-farmer of Voronezh; while the stormy period which produced Nekrassov lit the torch of Nikitin, a poet of humble origin. These three poets gave voice to the joys and sufferings of the great mass of the people—the peasantry and the proletariat, and they are in the true meaning of the word the Popular Poets of their country. Of late years no Russian poet has been strong enough to kindle a responsive spark from the intellectual darkness of the people.

Koltsov was undoubtedly what is called “a

## Poetry and Progress in Russia

natural genius"; but his poetry owes much of its significance to the fact that he wrote under the influence of Poushkin. For Poushkin, though debarred by aristocratic prejudice and the narrow education of his day from becoming a people's poet in the fullest sense, was the first Russian poet who ventured to depict society as he actually saw it. And just as the essential quality of Poushkin's poetry lies in this vivid portrayal of contemporary life and sentiment, so Koltsov describes in his songs the actual and inner life of the peasantry of which he was a witness and participant.

Others, after Koltsov, made "Poverty and Peasanthood" the theme of their verse and prose. To use the cant phrase of a later time, "they went to the people." But Koltsov *came from the people*, and herein lies the radical difference between his work and that of Nekrassov, a poet of keen observation, but born into a different social sphere. Koltsov approached the subject from its intimate aspects, and his views of rural life are identical with those of the class among whom he worked, suffered, and rejoiced. He is, as surely as those great prose writers who followed him, a realist, painting from actual experience. For this reason he deserves to be studied closely, for nowhere else shall we find more truthful, graphic—and withal saner—pictures of Russian rural life than in the pages of this farmer-poet.

## The Popular Poets

Alexei Vassilievich Koltsov was born at Voronezh, in the south-eastern provinces of Russia, on October 3rd, 1809 (Russian style). His father, a grazing-farmer, dealt also in hides and tallow. The family, though not actually poor, made no pretensions to superior refinement. The father was a man of stern character, with the limited views and culture of his class. Of the poet's mother we only know that her son was devoted to her. The boy showed such remarkable aptitude for learning that it was thought advisable to pass over the parish school and send him to the district school, where the education was somewhat better. But as soon as he had learnt to read and write, his father cut short his studies because he needed his help at home. Bielinsky, the poet's first biographer, says that Koltsov was now "plunged into the mire of a squalid occupation," and adds that he can hardly have imbibed any good principles, or received the "ennobling impressions" so important to the development of a young mind. In point of fact the lad's work during the summer months was far from unpleasant, and consisted chiefly in watching the herds which his father purchased in spring and turned out to fatten on the steppe. Nor is there any indication in Koltsov's writings that his early life was distasteful to him. The rough society of the cattle-dealers, the stifling atmosphere of petty bargaining, and all the details of a somewhat

## Poetry and Progress in Russia

sordid business passed lightly over a soul in constant communion with nature. The invigorating breezes and vast outlook of the steppe sufficed to efface all meaner impressions. But while his poetical instincts were nourished by intercourse with pastoral beauty, and by the picturesque national life which surrounded him, he was by no means devoid of that shrewd common-sense which is the characteristic of the peasantry.

During the weeks he spent on the steppe he had ample leisure for reading. His first books were national tales, which led to a taste for poetry and fiction. He also bought out of his savings a copy of Dmitriev's poems, and these, according to Bielinsky, he would chant to himself, because he could not believe that poetry was only intended to be read.

Koltsov's first poem, written at fifteen, owed its origin to the following incident. A friend had a strange dream which recurred three nights running. He related it to Koltsov, and so impressed the boy's imagination that he resolved to put the story into verse. He had no knowledge of the laws of versification, but chose a poem by Dmitriev and imitated it as closely as possible. *The Three Visions*, a weak effort in itself, decided Koltsov's career. Henceforward he gave himself up more and more to the fascination of rhyme and metre.

Two personalities exercised a considerable

## The Popular Poets

influence upon his early life : the one intellectually, the other emotionally. The literary resources of Voronezh were not abundant, but it possessed a small book-shop kept by a young man named Kashkin, whose education was superior to his station in life. Kashkin read Koltsov's first poetical attempts, and not only advised him to study prosody and versification, but procured him the necessary books. Thus the poet's strong and original gift developed, at first, exclusively under national, or rather local influences, and by the help of a man who was of the same social class to which Koltsov himself belonged.

The other personality who played so important a part in Koltsov's early manhood was the object of his first love. His father owned one young serf of rare beauty, who lived in the house as companion and help to the poet's sister. Koltsov was about seventeen when he fell in love with Douniasha. The girl returned his affection, and cherished hopes of marrying her young master and gaining her liberty. But Koltsov's father, having discovered this secret romance, took summary action to put an end to it. Profiting by his son's absence on the steppe, he sold the girl to a band of Cossacks who were passing through Voronezh. When the lover came home, to discover the cruel trick which had been played on him, he was beside himself with despair. Stricken with brain fever, he lay for some weeks

## Poetry and Progress in Russia

at the point of death. On his recovery he scoured the country in search of Douniasha, but never succeeded in tracing her again. In after years Koltsov told Bielinsky he had ascertained that the victim of this tragedy had been carried off to some Cossack settlement on the banks of the Don, where she soon succumbed to consumption, brought on by grief and brutal treatment at the hands of her new master.

After this incident Koltsov devoted himself more and more to poetry, which he found the best anodyne for his sorrow. Two new friendships partially consoled him for the loss of Douniasha. He now became acquainted with Andrei Serebriansky, a poet of some reputation, but greatly inferior to himself; and about the same time he met Stankievich, the Mæcenas of Moscow literary circles, whose father, a rich landowner, lived in the vicinity of Voronezh. At this period, too, a minor poet, Slukhaev, visited the town and was introduced to the local genius. Slukhaev read Koltsov's poems in manuscript, and profited by them in his own way. In 1830 he published a book entitled *Leaves from a Diary*, in which appeared three poems by Koltsov without any indication of the source from which they were taken. Koltsov seems to have been so overjoyed at seeing himself in print that he forgot to resent the theft of his verses. The following year the Moscow *Leaflet* accepted some

## The Popular Poets

of his work, and shortly afterwards Stankievich persuaded the editor of the *Literary Gazette* to publish his poem "The Ring." The attention of the literary world having been attracted to him, the epithets "farmer-poet," "self-made poet" caught the ear of the general public, and Koltsov awoke to find himself famous.

In 1835 he published, by subscription, a small volume of verse, which was enthusiastically welcomed and has ever since been widely read, though he never shared the extraordinary popularity of Nekrassov or Nadson.

Koltsov visited Moscow and Petersburg several times on his father's business, and on his return from each visit grew more and more dissatisfied with the narrowness of provincial life. In Moscow, Stankievich introduced him to the leading literary men of the day, including the critic Bielinsky, then at the zenith of his power. Tourgeniev, who met the poet at a literary evening at Pletneiev's house, left an impression which seems to bring the provincial poet palpably before us :—

"There was one guest in the room dressed in a long double-breasted overcoat, with a short waistcoat, a watch-chain of pale blue beads, and a neck tie tied in a knot. He was sitting in a corner with his feet modestly tucked out of the way, and from time to time he coughed a little, never forgetting to put his hand before his mouth.

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He looked about him with some diffidence, but appeared to be listening intently. His eyes were lit up with a remarkable intelligence, but his face was of a very ordinary Russian type. It was the poet Koltsov."

In 1837 the Tsarevich—afterwards Alexander II—visited Voronezh. With him went Joukovsky. The veteran writer spent all his spare time at the house of his brother-poet. It seems certain that Koltsov was presented to the Tsarevich. The whole town was elated at the honour, not to mention the poet's family. This was the moment of his greatest popularity. Unfortunately it tended to make him restless and proud, and finally raised up barriers between himself and his own people. He grew estranged from his father, and was hardly on speaking terms with his favourite sister. Added to these uncomfortable circumstances, another tragic love affair worked havoc with his happiness, and increased the consumptive tendency that had always threatened him. "Passionate love," says Bielinsky, "lit up the dawn of his life; and in a splendid, sinister, purple glow of passion his life went out. Closing his eyes to everything else, he drained with feverish thirst the full cup of morbid excitement." The lady was beautiful, intellectual, and accomplished, but without heart. Lightly she entered into a connection with Koltsov, and as

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lightly deserted him for some officer, with whom she suddenly left the town.

In the autumn of 1840 Koltsov paid his last visit to the two capitals. He was most anxious to settle permanently in Petersburg, and wrote for his father's permission to do so. The elder Koltsov, in a characteristic letter, told him to do as he pleased ; "but," added the old man, "if you stay I will give you my blessing, but nothing more." Koltsov returned home ill and dejected. Now for the first time he felt the pinch of poverty. His father was growing old, and the business had got into difficulties from which the poet—though not lacking in business capacity—could not extricate it single-handed. His constitution was rapidly breaking up. Alone, and neglected by his family, he spent most of his time in bed. Like most consumptives, he clung to the hope of recovery, and dreamt the unrealisable dream of returning to Petersburg. But though he allowed this idea to brighten his last days, he was too practical-minded not to see the obstacles which lay in the way of its fulfilment. "If I got there, how could I earn a living ? What new career is open to a man at thirty-three ?" These were the questions which he tried to solve as he lay tossing upon his sick-bed. At last death brought the answer to all his problems and perplexities. He passed away somewhat suddenly on 29th October, 1842.

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Koltsov has been called "the Russian Burns," and with more show of reason than is often to be found in these ready-made and loose-fitting analogies. In his best work he is, like Burns, a peasant writing for the peasantry. He unites the popular sentiment and popular style to a rare and impassioned lyricism and a mastery of the vernacular which can only be compared to that of the Scotch poet. His very titles introduce us into the atmosphere of Russian rural life, just as Burns's titles are racy of the Scotch soil: "The Shepherd's Song," "The Peasant's Feast," "The Mower," "The Full Harvest," "The Villager's Perplexity," etc. He has the same fine lyrical gift—less copious, perhaps, but equally melodious; the same powers of graphic realism; the same heartfelt inspiration. He also shares the same ardent temperament, though without the licentiousness of the Scotchman. But he was a paler reflection of Burns, and never, I think, touched the same depths or heights of passion. He sang the sorrows of the people in a tone of manly resignation, and their joys with more cheerfulness than actual mirth. Koltsov, compared with Burns, seems somewhat lacking in animal spirits.

He was at his best in the folk song, which in his hands loses nothing of the directness and vigorous elemental emotion which belong to the anonymous art of the people, while it gains in depth and variety by psychological treatment.

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He idealises the sentiment without conventionalising it. His language is at once natural and original, as his emotion is passionate and sincere.

If we compare him with his own countrymen, we must confess that the tragic intensity of the later Russian writers is lacking in Koltsov. He wrote before the time when a strenuous moral attitude was considered a *sine quâ non* in every Russian writer, be he poet, novelist, or journalist ; and the fact of his being, to a certain extent, an irresponsible singer has told against him with later generations, who do not consider him "serious." Under the influence of the radical utilitarian spirit, for which Dobrolioubov was in a measure accountable, Russia passed through a phase when a parrot trained to repeat the war-cries and watchwords of a party was more esteemed than a lark "singing hymns unbidden" for the mere joy of it.

Yet, judged apart from questions of "purpose," there is reason to believe that Koltsov's pictures of peasant life are, on the whole, as true as those which Nekrassov afterwards painted from such a monotonously sombre palette. In Nekrassov's "poems of purpose," Nature herself wages eternal war against the struggling peasants of his creation. His suns are always vertical ; they do not shine, but scorch ; the dews are chilling ; the winds hurricanes ; it literally never rains, but it pours. Even the agricultural implements join in

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a malignant league against their owners, and his peasant-women, when not in danger of sun-stroke, cut their feet with their own scythes and sickles. On Koltsov's harvest-fields : " Like God's guest, on all sides smiles the glad sun ; the light breeze passes o'er the field, rustling the golden corn in its shining path." Nekrassov's labourer, outworn, " stamped with a pathetic resignation and ceaseless fear," goes forth to his work with the curse of Adam on his brow. " Cheerily through the fields, cheerily I followed the plough and the harrow ; Gladly I looked on the fields and the stack-yard," sings Koltsov. Yet this attitude, with him, is not the outcome of a mere unreflecting optimism. He had his romance and his disillusionment. He suffered intensely ; nor was he blind to the larger sufferings of his class. Now and then we come upon a sharp cry of anguish, as in the poem " A Bitter Lot," or a profound sigh of regret, as in the little song which ends :—

Nay, my lips must not tell  
How grief weighs on my heart,  
Like some strange evil spell  
That will never depart.

But he deliberately cultivated the principle that it is better to be patient and ready to face whatever may betide, than to be blown like chaff upon the wind of despair. In his own words : " In spite of grief, to appear at the feast with merry smiles : To go to ruin, singing songs with the nightin-

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gales." Of all his poems of rural life, none brings out more clearly the spirit of half-humorous, half-pathetic resignation in which the Russian peasant meets his destiny than *The Mower*. That the spirit in which Koltsov sang of the lives of the poor was on the whole true to the class to which he belonged seems incontestably proved, if we compare his poetry with the legends and folk songs of the Russian people. In this anonymous literature which comes straight from the soul of the illiterate masses, what do we find? An undercurrent of melancholy common to all the Slav races; but by no means the reiterated note of despair, nor any of that resentful bitterness with which the cultured poets have invested the destiny of the peasant classes. The *bylinas* and folk songs ring the changes on all the elemental emotions of the human heart. Now we hear a note of poignant sadness, now of revenge, now of rollicking humour. In a word, the design of the folk literature is chequered, woven of the woof and weft of sorrow and gladness, and thus approaches more closely to the reality of life.

Koltsov's later poems, "The Meditations," do not require much comment. Under the influence of Bielinsky, an ardent disciple of Hegelianism, Koltsov became aware for the first time of philosophical ideas which his mind was not prepared to receive. Awakening late to the existence of certain moral and philosophical problems, his

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naturally clear, though untrained, intelligence became for a time overshadowed by a naïve and futile mysticism. "The Meditations," which are the outcome of this period, are no more to be compared with his "Songs" than a shallow clouded pool with an impetuous limpid brook. The force and subtlety of his intellect lay in the power of impassioned observation and clear insight into men and things, and not in the region of philosophical ideas. There is no need to apologise for Koltsov's intellectual shortcomings. His life was spent in humble circumstances, but he had the depth of vision and fervid love of nature which enables a poet to draw his inspiration from the common things of everyday life. Koltsov was, if not the greatest, certainly one of the healthiest, manliest, and most sincere of all the singers of Russia.



NEKRASSOV



## NEKRASSOV

“I AM sick of love songs,” said Shelley to Leigh Hunt; “will no one give us a hate song?” In Nekrassov we have a poet whose entire work—according to some of his critics—may be described as an implacable “hate song.” Among our own poets, not a few owe their greatest moments to the quality of being “good haters.” But I do not think in all our literature we shall find an instance of a writer—unless it be Swift—who frankly admits that his whole inspiration is rooted in bitterness and indignation. It needed the harsh school of Russian social and political life, as it existed under Nicholas I, to force such an abnormal growth, such an accumulation of the *sæva indignatio*. “More than thirty thousand verses shot forth in a single jet of gall,” says M. de Voguë. And if we entirely trust the judgment of this distinguished writer, the spring, poisoned at the source, resisted all the defecating processes of time, and ran bitter and troubled to the last.

I think it is Hazlitt who has observed that “spleen is the soul of patriotism and of public good”; and undoubtedly Nekrassov’s splenetic

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genius was a powerful weapon in the hands of the radical party in Russia. Some critics have endeavoured to excuse his bitterness on the ground that such rancour was the outcome of an excessive love for the people and an almost morbid sympathy for the sorrows of his race. This excuse—if indeed any excuse is needful—does not seem in conformity with what we know of Nekrassov's character. His irreconcilable bitterness and pessimism were, I think, partly due to the atmosphere in which his genius developed, but still more to the peculiarities of his temperament, which showed throughout a harsh, unbending fibre. I am not one of those who can see in the poems of Nekrassov much trace of that pent-up love for humanity to which, in milder moments, he himself attributes his inspiration. He certainly had not Dostoievsky's mystical tenderness, nor his passion of charity; still less can I discern the broad smile of indulgent humour characteristic of so many of his compatriots. A powerful dissolvent he is of the old systems, of serfdom, of spiritual oppression and narrowness of view; but undoubtedly what Matthew Arnold calls “an acrid dissolvent.”

The childhood of a poet frequently colours his whole after-life. As in Wordsworth's case, it may appear as the luminous point in his existence, to which he can look back in times of doubt and difficulty, the reflection from which, cast along

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the whole path of life, will not leave him altogether in unrelenting darkness. Nekrassov never possessed this reserve of gladness. Listen to Wordsworth in the opening pages of "The Prelude":—

Fair seed-time had my soul, and I grew up  
Fostered alike by beauty and by fear,  
Much favoured in my birthplace.

Contrast these lines with the harshly ironical poem "My Birthplace," in which Nekrassov evokes the memories of childhood: "Lo, there it stands, the ancestral home.—'Twas there I learnt to suffer and to hate!—Days of my youth, days we so falsely call precious and wonderful,—Pass before me in all your beauty!—Here is the dark and gloomy garden,—Down yonder path what face is that which flits among the sad and livid shadows?—I know what makes you weep, Mother!—Who ruined all your life? I know, I know!—But the thought of rebellion filled you with horror—You bore your fate with the silence of a slave."

Here we have the respective key-notes of two poets who, united in their choice of subjects—the cares and sufferings of the humble classes—have, as regards temperament, scarcely anything in common. Although they employed the same themes, it was invariably in different tonalities. Realism and optimism have been accepted as the poetical ideal of Wordsworth: realism and

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pessimism are the chief components of Nekrassov's work. But it is precisely to the latter element, so acceptable to a generation awaking from Utopian dreams of progress to intolerable disillusionment, and standing on the verge of the abyss of nihilism, that Nekrassov owes a popularity far exceeding anything that has fallen to the share of the saner English poet. Nekrassov is probably more widely read than any other writer in Russia. One learns the lesson of his popularity within a week of visiting that country, where the large octavo which represents the popular edition of his poems meets one at every turn of life. It is more in evidence than the ubiquitous volume of *Punch*, or the illustrated Longfellow, so indispensable to the homes of our English middle-classes. It is read by old and young alike, but particularly by the young, for the generous aspirations and somewhat self-willed sufferings of Russian youth leave for Russian middle-age little but apathetic acquiescence in the existing order of things. After forty—or earlier—the average Russian too often finds himself “flaccid and drained” of enthusiasm. Even nihilism has been proved to be a disease of youth, decreasing in proportion as its victims leave the age of exaltation behind them, and comparatively rare in those who have reached maturity.

But I must return to the poet himself, and endeavour to show what manner of man he was

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who for so long has held the heart of Russian youth between his hands.

Nicholas Alexeivich Nekrassov, born in 1821, was the son of an officer who left the service soon after the poet's birth, and lived on his estate in the vicinity of Yaroslav. He was a man of a stern, tyrannical temper. A stranger to all the softer and more elevated emotions, he was satisfied to hunt by day and drink by night, occupations which made up the ignoble round of life of many Russian landowners of that time. As a master, if we may trust his son's account, he seems to have been singularly brutal ; so much so, that we justly hesitate to accept him in this respect as an average type of serf-owner. The poet's mother, a woman of refined and gentle disposition, was the daughter of a wealthy Polish magnate. The elder Nekrassov made her acquaintance while serving with his regiment in Warsaw, and persuaded her to elope with him. The unfortunate lady paid for her folly by a life of martyrdom, and died, comparatively young, of consumption and a broken heart. The poet loved his mother, and owed to her the few softening influences in his life of storm and revolt. His references to her shine like stars in the gloomy atmosphere of his poetry ; and even these lights are dimmed by the memory of all she suffered.

Nekrassov was intended by his father for the military profession. That his inclinations were

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opposed to it weighed nothing with this domestic autocrat, who allowed no one to upset his calculations. But whatever qualities Nekrassov inherited from his mother—and from her he must have derived his poetic gift and almost morbid sensibility to human suffering—he did not share her capacity for passive resignation. Having been sent to St. Petersburg to join one of the military academies, he took the law into his own hands and entered himself at the University instead. His father replied to this act of disobedience by disinheriting his son, and leaving him, at sixteen, to make his living as best he could.

Now began that terrible struggle for existence which left its permanent traces upon Nekrassov; morally in the cynical embitterment of his attitude towards society, and physically in a more or less chronic ailment that several times threatened to put a premature end to his career. It was not with mere poverty he had to contend, but with actual, grim starvation. One winter's night he lay down exhausted upon a bench in some public garden in Petersburg, and was only saved from certain death by the charity of a professional tramp, who half carried him to the shelter of a neighbouring doss-house, where he earned a few pence by recopying the begging letters of the inmates.

Thanks to the help of Pletneiev, he struggled

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through his university course ; and through the succeeding years, during which he earned a wretched living by literary hack-work, he was sustained by an almost savage courage and endurance. He had, as he himself has said, the heart of a wolf-cub ; and day by day he knew the sharp hunger of the wolf in winter. His first volume of poems, *Dreams and Sounds*, was by no means an unqualified success. But in 1845 and 1846 appeared respectively two prose works, *The Physiology of St. Petersburg* and *The St. Petersburg Miscellany*, and Bielinsky soon discovered in the young author the striking originality, the trenchant irony, and powerful invective which were such effective weapons at that period of social and political stress. Henceforward his material prospects improved, but the turn in fortune's wheel came too late, and the spirit of revolt engendered by the privations of earlier years was never tamed. Nekrassov showed also remarkable business initiative and practical ability. Some doubt has been cast upon the means by which he so rapidly attained to easy circumstances. As far as I know no charge of actual dishonesty has ever been proved against Nekrassov ; but the fact that the most favourable of his biographers have not distinctly refuted these suspicions gives colour to the idea that some of his speculations were not always in accordance with the loftiness of his teaching.

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In 1847 he purchased, in association with Panaev, that leading organ, long connected with Poushkin's name, *The Contemporary*. The following year his prosperity received a sudden check, resulting from the stringent attitude of the censorship. For several years his pen rested in enforced idleness. After the death of Nicholas I, when all Russia was stirred to new aspirations and hopes of freedom, Nekrassov resumed his literary work, and acted both as editor and proprietor of several important papers. But if personal prosperity failed to change Nekrassov's attitude towards society, the great historical events which followed the accession of Alexander II were equally impotent to alter the temper of his writings. He seems to have had no elasticity of heart or mind. He was never caught up and carried along by any of those great currents of joy and enthusiasm which were set in motion during those wonderful years. The emancipation of the serfs, for instance, left the singer of their sufferings apparently untouched. At all events, it did very little to stop the acrid flow of his pessimism. But if his inspiration continued to move in the same rather narrow paths, it lost nothing of vigour with the advance of years. Towards middle-life he took more leisure and spent a good deal of his time in the country, where he could indulge his taste for sport, for, like Tourgeniev, he was a devotee of the chase. In 1875, his

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illness, from which he was rarely quite free, took a turn for the worse. An operation gave him a temporary relief from pain, but after lingering for nearly two years he died on November 27th, 1877, at the age of fifty-six.

His end was in keeping with the unbroken gloom of his life. M. de Voguë gives a dramatic picture of the poet's funeral. He says:—

“The young nihilistic party followed their singer to the cemetery of the Convent of the Virgin outside Petersburg. It was one of those silent, sullen processions, conducted under the eye of the police, to which Russia was then growing accustomed. Upon the dangerous dead man great boulders of red granite were thrown, rough and sombre as his own work. It seemed as though they thought these weighty monoliths would be better able to keep down the spirit of revolt which once inhabited this body.”

I do not know what inscription may be found upon Nekrassov's tomb, but surely there could be none more fitting than that which Swift chose for his own epitaph:—

Where bitter indignation cannot lacerate the heart.

If I seem to have drawn a somewhat negative and unlovable picture of Nekrassov, I must appeal in justification to such of his poems as have impressed me most. By these I have

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judged him, and it is generally acknowledged that his poems constitute the truest biography of this original but warped genius. Yet it is precisely against this method of judgment that one of his greatest admirers, A. M. Skabichevsky, has protested in his *History of Modern Russian Literature*. In Nekrassov's poetry there are, he says, two principal elements, and in judging from individual examples of his work we must be careful that we do not altogether overlook one or the other of these leading constituents. The one most constantly present in his earlier poems, is the reflective pessimistic spirit of the forties ; the other is of later growth, and is defined by Skabichevsky as a passionate enthusiasm for the people, and a fervent faith in their ultimate victory over darkness and oppression. The secret of Nekrassov's extraordinary popularity, according to that writer, lies in the fact that he is "the universal singer of his country and his age." I do not deny Nekrassov's variety of theme, nor his wide outlook upon contemporary life, far from it ; it is only the light in which he views things which seems to me to a certain extent both false and monotonous. A coloured-glass window will show as wide an expanse of the outer world as a clear one ; yet be the tint rose-coloured or smoked, those who look through it cannot pretend that they have seen nature as it really exists. But if he is monotonous in

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mood, Nekrassov certainly commands a varied range of subjects. He has represented all the strata of Russian society, from the drawing-rooms of the capital to the garrets and cellars of the proletariat, from the houses of the country gentle-folk to the dilapidated hut of old Aunt Nelina. He is the poet of every class in turn, and his verses, as he himself has said, are "the living witnesses of tears which I have shed for all."

And not only does Nekrassov paint the external life of his fellow-countrymen, but he reflects the spirit of the transition period in which he lived. The poet started his career under the influence of that subjective pessimism which was the characteristic temper of the forties, when the conscience of the intelligent classes was awaking to new ideals, but also to a bitter sense of their inability to realise them. Hence the spirit of profound weariness which breathes in so many of his early works. In this mood he created the hero of his poem "Sasha," that type of Russian youth whose "powers of action have been eaten up by thought." Noble-minded, accessible to all lofty ideals, but lacking in passion and will-power; who, when he thinks himself in love, is yet conscious that it is his brain which is excited—not his blood. Sasha is own brother to Tourgeniev's Roudin, and both in their turn are the direct descendants of Hamlet. But, as time went

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on, Nekrassov's poetry began to show the presence of a second influence, altogether new in the poetry of Russia, though already noticeable in the fiction—that enthusiasm for the common people and interest in their lot which inspired all his best work. In his well-known poem "The Schoolboy" he first shows this change of mood. Here we have the nearest approach to an optimistic view of life which can be found in all Nekrassov's works: "Not unendowed is that nature,—Not yet lost is that land,—Which sprang from such a people—So glorious—aye so good and noble.—There we find strong and loving spirits,—Amid the weak, the indifferent, and the selfish." It seemed as though the poet had discovered a cure for the malady of his age. Had Nekrassov himself possessed a more robust faith in his new ideal "the people," and a greater share of the uplifting spirit of hope, he might indeed have been the saviour of his generation and those to come. But who believes in a remedy which the physician himself seems half to doubt? Too often he relapses from this ideal view of the people and shows them up with merciless realism, as in his last great poem, half-civilised, given up to superstition, "in the depths of night, without a notion of God or of truth," moving as in "subterranean darkness without a torch."

Nekrassov, though he has analysed love from

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several points of view, has left no love lyrics in the ordinary sense of the word. This was not because, like Crabbe, he was merely an objective writer, the realistic painter of rural life. An intensely subjective note is frequently heard in Nekrassov's poetry. Nor was it altogether because, like Wordsworth, his emotions were diffused over wider areas of human sympathy. The real reason seems to be that the part which sexual love played in his life did not tend to awaken sweet or tender harmonies. His passions appear to have run in the same rugged and bitter channels as all his other sentiments. Even Swift can drop the lash of savage scorn with which he flagellates humanity at large, can grow gentle and have recourse to his "little language," when he addresses Stella. Nekrassov has no "little language"; he cannot soften, even to the woman he seems to have loved best. In his poem "The Unhappy"—generally believed to have some biographical significance—he speaks of the love-episode of his life in a tone which suggests as much hatred as tenderness :—

I loved—but as a jealous savage loves.

O thou, from whom in horror oft I fled,  
Only to go back to thine arms once more ;  
On whom with all my heart I used to pour  
Blessings and curses mingled—thou art dead !  
But thou hast left mysterious, doubtful traces  
Upon my life's most hidden ways and places.

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Sometimes thou camest, an angel in the storm,  
And sometimes in the haven of my hope  
I saw thee waiting in a demon's form.  
Thou art no more! No longer couldst thou cope  
With this tempestuous heart, nor yet with fate,  
And having dug about my feet a pit,  
Thou wast thyself the first to lie in it.  
I might abjure thee now, who wast of late  
My cherished idol; aye, and I might brand  
Thy name before the world. But no, my hate  
Has neither power nor will to follow thee  
Beyond the grave. Now, too, I understand  
How both of us did sin, although on me  
Has fall'n the heavier pain and penalty.  
The years run out their course, but o'er my head  
E'en time itself stands still: unheeded, lost,  
Like a forgotten sentry at his post  
I stand, nor move, through all the dreary night.  
And suddenly suspicion sharp and dread  
Possesses me; it is thy step, thy cry,  
Thy voice which says, "I never can forgive!"  
How clearly all comes back to ear and eye!  
It seems to me that every day I live  
I murder thee afresh——

Rarely does this harsh mood give place to a more tender sentiment, the short poem "I visited thy tomb" being an exquisite exception. This attitude towards the other sex, compounded of fierce passion and fiercer remorse, deprives Nekrassov of one charm common to nearly all the great Russian writers: we shall search his poems in vain for such a sympathetic and noble type of womanhood as Poushkin created in Tatiana; or for such instances of subtle and delicate feminine

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psychology as Tourgeniev and Tolstoi have given us in later years. For it is impossible to agree with Skabichevsky, who sees in the histrionic figures of the princesses in "Russian Women" real creatures of warm and palpitating flesh and blood. These embodiments of all the antique virtues, who are suddenly transformed from fashionable women of the world into Roman matrons, do not greatly appeal to me; nor am I moved by all their sufferings, which take place in a very scenic Siberia. Of all his heroines, the most touching and real seems to me the peasant Daria in *Red-nosed Frost*.

And if Nekrassov lacks the tenderness and delicate insight which could enable him to create a beautiful and convincing feminine type, he occasionally falls short in another quality which belongs essentially to the traditions of Russian literature and art—I mean the quality of absolute sincerity. There are passages—intended to be the most impressive—in Nekrassov's poems which bring us a sudden sense of disillusionment. We become aware that the poet is forcing the note, and it rings false in consequence. A breath of exaggeration, a suspicion of special pleading—and the "palpable design" stands revealed before us. The poet is posing as the mouthpiece of a party, and our sympathies suffer an instantaneous collapse. These highly wrought pictures of human suffering, such as we have in the very popular

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poem of rural life *Orina, the Soldier's Mother*, are they indeed realistic art, or something touched up to look larger and more lurid than actual life? Like "Uncle Tom's Cabin," "Oliver Twist," or "The Ticket of Leave Man," their excuse may be that they have done good service in arousing an apathetic public to redress special evils; but does not their emphasis obscure a portion of the truth? And is not truth more important than all else?

This pose of "emphasis" and "purpose" gradually grows upon Nekrassov, until in his last long poem, "Who lives happily in Russia?" we find little beside it. The poet is lost in the pamphleteer. The subject of this lengthy and somewhat ostentatious poem is as follows: Some peasants, discontented with their hard lot, ask, "Who leads a free and happy life in Russia?" To arrive at a solution of this problem they set out on a pilgrimage. They interview the priest, the government official, the merchant; but from all classes of society they receive unsatisfactory replies. Such a subject, as may be imagined, gives Nekrassov ample opportunity for copious pessimistic moralising. There are some vigorous descriptive moments in the work, but the general effect is tedious and depressing. The following little picture is one of the oases in a desert of prolixity. Our travellers have passed the village and now they see—

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—“Like a mirror enclosed in a green frame—A pool filled to the very brim.—On the swaying raft chained to the margin—Stands the priest’s stout daughter washing clothes.—Like a haycock she stands—With her skirt tucked up around her.—On the washing-raft the ducks and drakes are drinking.—Hark! A horse neighs!—The peasants turn to see.—In the water two heads are visible.—One is the head of a peasant—Curly-haired and swarthy.—The sunlight twinkles on his silver ear-rings.—The other head belongs to a horse.—A halter is tied to his foot.—The peasant holds the halter in his mouth.—He swims and the horse swims too.—He neighs and the horse neighs back to him.—They make a commotion as they swim past the woman and the little ducks.—The raft bobs up and down.—Now he has overtaken the horse and caught him by the mane!—Away over the meadows gallops the lusty youth ;—His body gleams white, but his neck is tanned almost black.—The water runs down in streams from the horse and his rider.”

But we are soon back again on our pilgrimage, in which we are continually brought up sharply against Wordsworthian “blocks of afflicting prose”; for the peasants are as naïve and garrulous as in real life. The subject might have been as effectively handled in prose, especially from the pulpit or the platform. As poetry the work is more oppressive than “The Excursion,”

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and moves with more unrelenting slowness than Crabbe's "Parish Register."

It is not, however, in any of the works enumerated that Nekrassov's verse is most strenuous and profoundly pathetic, but rather in those poems of popular life which appealed most successfully to his objective realism, and in which he is so carried away by the subject that he forgets for a time to pose as the "Träger der Zeit-Idee." If it is difficult to classify Nekrassov by such poems as "The Unhappy" and "Russian Women," when we come to the crown of his work—his great national epic, "Red-nosed Frost"—we recognise him at once as belonging to the main current of modern Russian literature, the naturalistic school, the origin of which is usually ascribed to Gogol. In that chain of prose writers who caught up the essential spirit of the nation and uttered it in fiction—Gogol, Dostoievsky, Tourgeniev, Tolstoi, and others—Nekrassov, although he employs poetry as a medium of expression, is undoubtedly a connecting link. In *Red-nosed Frost* he deals once more with "the moving common-places of the human lot"; but here he uses his powers at once with more freedom and more self-control than in many of his poems. He subdues on the one hand the violence of diction which mars much of his intimate verse; and on the other he rises above the flatness and dullness of dialect by which he sometimes reminds us of

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Wordsworth at his worst. In the opening of the poem, Nekrassov describes a noble type of Slavonic peasant-woman which is not, he declares, altogether extinct in the country districts.

Such women, calm and dignified of face,  
May still in Russian villages be seen,  
Who in their movements show both strength and grace  
And boast the glance and carriage of a queen.

She blooms, this peasant beauty—blooms to fill  
The world with deep surprise ; plump, rosy, tall,  
Each one at her laborious task shows skill,  
And, lo, the robe of beauty clothes them all!

She bears both cold and hunger patiently,  
With even temper and forbearance mild.  
How oft I've watched her mow, surprised to see  
Such sweep of arm—such mighty haycocks piled !

She does not care to waste a working-day;  
But you would hardly know the lass again  
When, later on, a glad smile drives away  
From off her face the stamp of toil and strain.

No horseman can contend with her at play ;  
Her brave heart brings salvation in hard days.  
'Twas she who chased and caught the runaway,  
And walked into the cottage all ablaze.

Daria, the heroine of *Red-nosed Frost*, belongs to this type of peasantry, as far as possible removed from those examples "stamped with dull apathy and ceaseless fear" which the poet

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has created in his pessimistic vein. Daria is a sympathetic and arresting figure: a true epic heroine, fighting to her last breath against an inexorable destiny. In the first part of this great national picture, Nekrassov has chosen to employ the subdued colours and sober lights that recall some masterpiece of Millet's. There are wonderful realism and true pathos in the scenes from rural life, which succeed each other rapidly, naturally, and without any of the verbosity of *Who lives happily in Russia?* The death of Daria's husband, Prokl, the bread-winner of the family; the dignified mourning of the wife and of Prokl's old parents; the respectful, silent sympathy of the neighbours; the description of the lonely village churchyard, "its crosses half-unearthed by gales," where the old man goes to choose and dig a grave for his son—a difficult job that needs tact; one cannot deal, he says, with the soil of the churchyard as one does with the common earth; the homeward drive of the stricken parents in the dusk of evening, interrupted by the weird apparition of the village idiot—all these things are painted from real life and are admirably convincing.

In the second part, how touching is the picture of Daria going to the forest, axe in hand, to do her husband's work! Red-nosed Frost, the personification of the Russian winter in all its terrible power and autocratic tyranny, now

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appears upon the scene. With the introduction of this fantastic and supernatural element the scheme of colour changes, and the poet gives us a magic picture, sharp and glittering with iridescent lights, like the frozen landscape it depicts. Daria, overcome with cold, sinks down under a forest tree. The Frost King waves his sceptre over her head, and strange visions pass through her brain. She dreams of a hot summer's day, of the harvest fields, of laughter and games, and of her husband and children. Gradually she passes away with a smile on her lips, having "earned forgetfulness" by the kiss of the Frost King. In this poem Nekrassov shows throughout an imaginative power and a passionate observation of nature which raise him for the time being to the level of the greatest poets—not of Russia only, but of all the world.

Coming to the question of style, we observe that, either because the subject of his verse absorbed him to the exclusion of technical consideration, or because he was naturally deficient in a fine sense for form, beauty of utterance takes a secondary place in Nekrassov's work. In this respect he owes nothing to the great singers, Poushkin and Lermontov, who preceded him and left traditions of a stately and perfected art. Nekrassov has not the sustained afflatus of the author of *Eugene Onegin*, nor the glowing colour and passionate abandonment of

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Lermontov ; neither has he the lyric lilt and rapture of Koltsov. Of his poetry one can rarely say : *Ca coule de source*. His verses—he himself admitted it—are “rough and uncouth without creative art.” But their dissonance and want of spontaneity are forgotten in their vigour and striking originality. His manner—or lack of it—is his own. His imagery is new and forcible. He carries his bluntness to the verge of uncouthness, and his frankness over the border-line of cynicism. He aimed at being a great didactic poet, and undoubtedly possessed some of the necessary qualities for the part. His convictions were sincere, though he sometimes expressed them with exaggerated eloquence. Against the tyranny and obscurantism of the world in which he lived his irony was unsparing. But his teaching, though impressive, was one-sided and untrustworthy. Nekrassov had not the balanced mind that “sees life steadily and sees it whole.” To him the world must often have appeared in an atmosphere made tremulous by the heat of his own fury. Temperamentally he was unable to see any but the dark places of life into which no light of joy or hope could penetrate for long. Nekrassov’s liturgy of life was comminatory. It contained the *Miserere*, but no *Jubilate Deo*. Looking back to the circumstances of his career, we understand and pardon the unquenchable fires of indignation which consumed the tenderness

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of his nature. But seeing the widespread influence of his poetry, it is impossible to disregard his potency as a teacher; and we cannot but confess that in that capacity it is a message of bitterness and revolt, rather than of hope and self-control, which his work hands on to successive generations of Young Russia.

## NIKITIN

JUST a month after the first engagement between the Russians and the Turks at Isakeha, in November, 1853, when the air was heavy with rumours of the approaching war in the Crimea, there appeared in a provincial paper, the *Voronezhsky News*, a patriotic poem, entitled "Russia," which immediately attracted the attention of literary circles. The verses, though not remarkable as regards their literary quality, were spontaneous and spirited; they were, moreover, *felices opportunitate*, and were soon republished by many of the leading papers of both capitals. They were signed only with the initials "N. N.", and while they thrilled the heart of the nation, set every one speculating as to their authorship. After a time it transpired that they were written by Ivan Nikitin, a young man of the humbler classes, who lived in very poor circumstances in the town of Voronezh. The accidents of birthplace and rank caused Nikitin to be hailed as a second Koltsov, although his poetical gift was very different in character from that of his illustrious fellow-townsman. The circumstances of his early life, which brought him into daily contact with the poor, led



NIKITIN



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him to select his subjects from that side of existence which he knew most intimately ; but there are occasional evidences in his writings that this was sometimes more of necessity than of natural inclination. Nikitin began life with deeper culture and a broader intellectual outlook than Koltsov. Whereas the latter did not fall under the influence of Bielinsky and Hegelianism until his fame as a poet was fairly established, the former imbibed this German philosophy while still at the seminary of Voronezh. Thus the inward conflict between national sentiment and Western culture was far stronger in Nikitin, the child of the forties, than in the farmer-poet, who belonged to an earlier generation.

Ivan Saveich Nikitin was born in 1824 at Voronezh. His father, originally in the service of the Church, left it for some unexplained reason and set up as a candle manufacturer under the assumed name of Nikitin. At the time of his son's birth he was in prosperous circumstances, and lived in the most picturesque part of Voronezh. The house in which the poet was born commanded on three sides wide, panoramic views of the steppe ; while on the fourth it looked towards the famous monastery of Mitrofane, with its towering belfry and glittering domes and crosses. Nikitin's father possessed shrewd native wit and more culture than was common to his social position. He was capable of deep feeling, and

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was sincerely attached to his wife and only child. Unfortunately, added to these qualities he had an irascible and despotic temper. Praskovaya Nikitin was the opposite of her husband—retiring, patient, and meekly affectionate. Like Poushkin, the poet had the good fortune to be brought up by a nurse versed in folk-lore and local tradition. Nikitin was educated at one of the Church schools in the town, and afterwards at the seminary, which seems to have been considerably above the average provincial school of that period. He distinguished himself more especially in literature, and his father was justified in his ambition of sending his son to the University with a view of his ultimately becoming a doctor. But these hopes were never realised, for by the time the poet's school-days drew to an end the elder Nikitin found himself involved in business troubles. These difficulties exasperated his naturally irritable temper, and he sought refuge from them in drink. The family life grew intolerably wretched, and the unhappy wife, worn out by her husband's caprices and tyranny, fell into the same vice.

Nikitin left school in 1843. His biographer and friend, de Poulé, describes him at this period of his life as being an athletic youth of medium height, with a remarkably intelligent face. His dark eyes had that depth of vision which we associate with genius. His manners were ex-

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ceedingly refined—he was even something of a dandy. He lived like a silent guest in his own house, shrinking from the uncongenial atmosphere and escaping into quiet corners to read or play the *guslee*,<sup>1</sup> which constituted his favourite indoor pursuits. Debarred from social intercourse by his miserable domestic surroundings, the sole companion of his boyhood was his cousin Anna, whose widowed mother lived near to the Nikitins. Silent and self-controlled, he knew none of the pleasures of youth. Nature had given him a warm, impressionable heart, but his home life chilled and disgusted him. He early acquired a fundamental sternness towards himself and others, which never entirely melted, even in a more sympathetic atmosphere. Intellectually he was at this time an adherent of Bielinsky's early views—that is to say, he had imbibed extreme notions of idealism and individualism.

Twelve months after Nikitin left school, his mother died a victim to worry and intemperance. The old man was shocked by his wife's death, but not into ways of sobriety. On the contrary, he now gave way uncontrollably to his besetting sin, and there followed ten years of ever-increasing strife and domestic degradation, too painful to dwell upon in detail. The son's life was a constant martyrdom. In a very short time, between

<sup>1</sup> The little horizontal harp of the Russians.

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the half-crazy toper and the lad untrained in business habits, the candle-factory was ruined. None of the tradespeople would employ the young man in their shops or warehouses, for they were shy of entering into any connection with the elder Nikitin. At last, when starvation was actually staring him in the face, the poet was offered, and accepted, the management of a way-side public-house, frequented chiefly by the *izvostchiki*, or drivers of hired vehicles. Here, dressed in the high boots and coarse cotton shirt of the Russian labouring classes, the disciple of Bielinsky, the aspirant for university honours, fulfilled his double duties of ostler and barman. He carried out his uncongenial work with the practical thoroughness which characterised all his undertakings. At the same time, in spite of his squalid surroundings, his delight in literature increased day by day. All his spare moments were spent in the hay-loft, where he wrote his verses and kept his modest library. When he found he could make a living out of the inn, he built a small wooden wing adjoining the premises, and there he brought his father to live with him.

As his love of poetry grew, so also did the spirit of self-criticism. He was tormented by doubts as to the quality of his own inspiration. As a means of setting his mind at rest Nikitin sent several poems to newspapers and reviews, but for a long

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time he had not even the doubtful consolation of polite refusal. He was simply ignored. At last, however, in 1849, the *Voronezhsky News* published two poems, "The Forest" and "Meditation." In a special paragraph the editor explained that the striking merits of the poems had induced him to break through his rule against the publication of verses. Furthermore, he invited the anonymous author to communicate his name and address. Nikitin, though greatly encouraged by these words of appreciation, was restrained by a kind of fierce pride from revealing his identity. For four years he continued to struggle on unknown and unaided, until in 1853 he once more approached the local paper with his patriotic poem "Russia," with what results we have already seen. This time Nikitin sent with his verses a letter, briefly relating the facts of his life and confessing his ambition for the future.

Through the editor of the *Voronezhsky News* Nikitin found a valuable friend in Nikolai Ivanovich Vtorov, the leader of intellectual society in the town and its neighbourhood. Vtorov showed a genuine brotherly interest in the young poet, invited him to his house, and introduced him to influential people. Nikitin's fame now spread as rapidly as Koltsov's had done twenty years earlier. The poorer classes were proud to speak of their "publican-poet"; while the *intelligentsia* held out the hand of fellowship. But Nikitin, frozen by

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years of suffering, thawed slowly in the unaccustomed warmth of praise and sympathy.

In the literary world he was welcomed by Voedensky and Valerian Maikov, who both predicted for him a brilliant future, if he would remain true to his role of national poet.

In a letter to Nikitin, Maikov says: "We need a great deal of character to preserve our national sentiments here in Petersburg. Do you know how much I envy you, and why? I envy you because you were born and nurtured in 'frieze-clad' Russia, and consequently you must know her better than I can." But these critics wrote with an imperfect knowledge of the man with whom they had to deal. He was, as I have said, no second Koltsov, no local poet of the steppes. His inclinations were towards Western culture. His tendencies were subjective and idealistic; yet the world demanded of him an objective nationality which he only felt in rare moments of patriotic fervour. In spite of some works of a national character, his position as "publican-poet" was a false one, and he realised it.

In 1854, thanks to the good offices of Vtorov, Count Dmitri Tolstoi undertook to pay for the publication of a small volume of Nikitin's poems. The book did not actually appear until two years later, and its reception was disappointing. During these years the poet continued to manage his inn, but found time to study French and German, and to

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sketch out his longest and most popular poem *The Village Money-lender* (Koulak). Some of the most interesting biographical details of this period are to be found in Nikitin's correspondence with Vtorov, who left Voronezh in 1857 and went to reside in St. Petersburg. Here is a little picture from his daily life : "I am standing by my table on which my books are arranged. Glancing at them, I smile the smile of self-congratulation and think : 'Well, deuce take it all, am I not really a great man, and the possessor of five new books ?' But suddenly, to my disgust, some cab-driver recalls me to reality with the cry : 'Hullo there ! A feed of hay, Savelich !'"

Sometimes his letters betray moments of extreme dejection. His work by no means realised his ambitions, which were great. "I do not care to be a mere glow-worm," he writes. "Perhaps with strenuous effort I may accomplish something tolerable, but the atmosphere I breathe poisons inspiration." His father had frequent attacks of delirium tremens. When prostrate from the results of his orgies, his son treated him with consideration and even tenderness ; but as soon as he was well the tenderness gave place to resentment. "When he is sober I cannot find it in my heart to forgive him my sufferings," the young man used to say. But no persuasion on the part of friends could induce him to give up the care of the wretched old man.

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*The Village Money-lender* was published in 1857, and met with immediate success. It is a sombre and realistic drama, based on a story of unthrift and ruin common enough among the lower middle-classes in Russia. Probably the story has some autobiographical significance, though many such cases may have come under Nikitin's observation. But it is said that the poet's father recognised his own portrait in Loukitch, the unfortunate bankrupt, who is the chief character of the poem. The picture is not a cruel one. Nikitin depicts him as a man of strong personality driven by force of circumstance into moral collapse. The gradual degeneration of this bourgeois hero is realistically told with analytical skill, but with the indulgence towards the "humiliated and offended" which characterises all the Russian realists, except sometimes Nekrassov and Tourgeniev.

The various national types in *The Village Money-lender* are evidently drawn from life; and here, as in many of his shorter poems, his sketches of local scenery are admirable in a somewhat literal way. On account of their lucid simplicity, in which every word tells, they lose in translation more of atmosphere and colour than would a more artificial and florid landscape.

The success of *The Village Money-lender* encouraged its author to set to work on another long poem on similar lines, but by no means

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equal in interest, *The Mayor of the Town*. This was followed by a prose work, *The Diary of a Seminarist*.

In 1854 Nikitin began to suffer from a complication of painful ailments and his health became very variable. At this time, de Poulé says, he fell in love with the daughter of a well-educated and respectable tradesman in the town, but with characteristic austerity he stamped out his passion, because he felt the impossibility of bringing such a wife to the wretched home he had to offer. A few years later, finding himself in possession of a modest sum, earned partly from the inn and partly from literary work, he began to consider how he might invest it in some more congenial business. He had long cherished the idea of opening a superior book-shop in Voronezh. His capital hardly sufficed for this purpose, but thanks to the help of two or three friends, one of whom, Kourbatov, was to be a kind of partner, the business was eventually started. Nikitin threw himself heart and soul into the work; so much so indeed that his friends became alarmed lest the poet should be entirely lost in the successful tradesman. There is something almost ridiculous in the attitude of his partner Kourbatov, who was shocked at the profits Nikitin managed to realise on his goods, and complained that the poet was as bad as his own Village Money-lender. Nikitin retorted that his aims were all

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practical ; he had not the slightest wish to be merely a “poet-bookseller.” But though a keen man of business, he was not ungenerous, and many poor scholars in Voronezh had to thank him for the loan of books they could not have afforded to buy.

In 1860 Nikitin visited Moscow and Petersburg. But these visits were of a purely business character, and, unlike Koltsov, he does not appear to have mixed with the literary element in either capital. During this year he started, in association with de Poulé, a review, *The Voronezhsky Miscellany*, to which he was a constant contributor. Indeed, he was at this time so full of vitality, and so cheerful in his new prosperity, that it came as a shock to his friends when early in 1861 symptoms of rapid consumption developed themselves.

Nikitin’s life closed with a romance—a Novel in Ten Letters—which de Poulé has published in his biography of the poet. The heroine belonged to a family of good position living near the town. Nikitin began to correspond with her in March, 1860, and his last letter to her was dated July, 1861—three months before his death. She seems to have been a woman of considerable character and strong feeling. Once, having heard that Nikitin was lying seriously ill with no other attendant than his faithful cousin Anna, she proposed to go and nurse him in the miserable

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inn, where from motives of economy he still lived with his father. Such a proposal required considerable courage from a girl in her position in those days of class distinction. Nikitin, though deeply touched by her devotion, refused to take advantage of it ; nor would he permit her to compromise herself by visiting him, when a few weeks later he actually lay upon his death-bed.

The poet's agony was long and painful, and was rendered more so by the unnatural conduct of his father. During the last weeks of his son's life Savich Nikitin was rarely sober, and frequently startled the dying man from his sleep by bursting into his room in a drunken frenzy. His cousin Anna dared not leave his bedside for a moment, until on October 17th, 1861, the unhappy poet had passed quietly away. Nikitin was buried in a grave adjoining that of Koltsov, in the Mitrofansky Cemetery. The father survived for nearly three years the son whose life he had so greatly embittered.

Nikitin has not the originality, nor the stern and sombre powers of Nekrassov. There is nothing strikingly new in his themes, nor yet in his treatment of them ; nevertheless he adds something to the sum of Russian poetry which is distinctively his own. For convenience' sake we may adopt the plan of Skabichevsky and divide his poems into two classes : those written under the influence of Poushkin's school—the school of

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“art for art’s sake”—which are generally subjective in tendency ; and those poems of national life, more objective in character, in which he follows in the steps of Nekrassov, though without his aggressive display of purpose and extravagant pessimism. To the first class belong most of those closely observed and delicately coloured landscapes in which he has no rival among the Russian poets ; such are *Morning*, *A Winter’s Night in the Village*, and *The Swallow’s Nest*. The second category includes those pictures of rural life which partially recall Koltsov and Nekrassov, and also our own poet Wordsworth. Such poems as *The Labourer*, *The Ploughshare*, *The Postboy’s Wife* are peculiarly Russian in their restrained yet touching realism. Perhaps there is no better example of this type of poem than the one I have ventured to translate under the title of *The Gaffer*. Its laconic pathos is truly Russian, while it is literal enough to have been signed by Crabbe.

If we compare Nikitin to Koltsov, we shall find greater intellectual maturity, but less passion and joy in existence and in nature. “A subdued melancholy,” says Skabichevsky, “sets all Nikitin’s thoughts in a kind of twilight atmosphere. He is tender and fascinating, but lacking in energy and the power to wake an intense emotional thrill.”

Nikitin lived at a time of excitement and unrest, when Russia stood on the verge of a great social

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change—the emancipation of her serfs. Like most of his contemporaries, he was in sympathy with the main objects of the reform. He was a child of that generation which had developed with almost fatal rapidity. But he had graduated in a school of adversity, and saw life as it is, without illusions or pretence. As he was never deluded by the marsh-lights of false hope, which dazzled so many of his contemporaries, so it is improbable that, had he lived on into the stormy years of the seventies, he would ever have drifted into the slough of despair and complete negation. The spiritual break-up, tending to Nihilism, which he witnessed in so many of his friends, filled him with unaffected sorrow. The same spirit of moderation ruled his intellectual views. He saw the commencement of that sharp strife between Western and Slavophil, which for so many years divided the world of art and literature in Russia ; but to enroll himself unconditionally under either banner involved the sacrifice of something he held precious. On the one hand, that respect for culture which he had learned from Bielinsky and his German teachers ; on the other, that close and intimate union with the national idea which was his birthright, and to which he owed his reputation as a poet. This divided faith, with its complex issues, is reflected in his poetry, making at once its weakness and its charm. Yet it is the keenest reproach of some of Nikitin's critics that he remained a Laodicean to the last.

VERSES FROM KOLTSOV,  
NEKRASSOV, AND NIKITIN

KOLTSOV

THE SONG OF THE PLOUGHMAN

Now, grey mare, go forward,  
Speed swift by the acre,  
And along the damp earth  
Let our firm share be brightened.

The dawn, like a beauty,  
In the gay heavens is burning,  
From out the deep forest  
The sun comes in glory.

'Mid the acres 'tis lusty,  
So, grey mare, forth speed thee,  
'Tis I that now guide thee,  
Both servant and master.

I prepare for thee gladly  
The plough and the harrow,  
The wain is now ready,  
The seed I am flinging.

I look round right cheery  
On rick and on hovel.  
I grind and I winnow—  
Now, grey mare, speed forward.

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Let us plough in the morning,  
The grey mare to help us,  
Let us make for the grain there  
The holiest of cradles.

The damp mother earth  
Meat and drink gives in plenty—  
Soon the stalks will be rising,  
Now, grey mare, go forward.

The stalks will spring upward,  
The ears will be growing—  
It will ripen all glorious  
In rich golden tissue.

Now our sickles shall glisten,  
Now our scythes shall be rattling,  
We shall rest us right gladly  
On the sheaves deeply laden.

Now, grey mare, go forward,  
I'll feed thee in plenty,  
Thou shalt drink at thy leisure  
The clear bubbling fountain.

I will plough, I will sow,  
With this prayer breathed in silence—  
Grant me, God, of Thy mercy  
Bread—my only possession.

*Translated by W. R. Morfill.*

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### A SONG OF OLDEN TIMES

From the dense forests of the North  
It is no storm-cloud issues forth,  
But the armed host, so strong and fell,  
Of Moscow's Tsar, the Terrible.

As a swift-pinioned bird takes flight  
Across the sea, so Russia's might  
Moves onward ; o'er the trackless face  
Of the lone steppe they speed apace.

Lo, uninvited guests they go  
To seek the Tsar's inveterate foe,  
The Moslem chief, the cruel Khan,  
In his famed city of Kazán.

Once there, they drink till dawn of day,  
Then Russ and Tatar join the fray ;  
Kazán's strong walls are battered down  
And Russian troops parade the town.

The *Voievodes* ride in and beat  
The Tatars back from street to street,  
Till on the tower, ere day is done,  
The young Tsar stands—“ The Crimson Sun.”

*Translated by Rosa Newmarch.*

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### SONG

It was not at the springtide  
When life renews her sheen,  
When in the waking meadows  
The young grass first shows green.

No tender dawns were flushing  
The sky with rosy-red,  
Nor did the moon her love-light  
Upon our wooing shed.

No, all was chill, but under  
The coldness and the mist  
I wrapped my love around you  
And held you closely kissed.

The nights of storm and darkness  
Flew over us apace,  
More swiftly than the clouds fly  
Athwart the sun's bright face.

And when the winter tempest  
Howled furious and strong,  
We listened while it chanted  
For us its strange, wild song.

Till sleep th' enchanter found us  
And led us by the hand,  
Across the plains of silence  
Into his wonderland.

*Translated by Rosa Newmarch.*

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## SONG

Nay, my lips may not tell,  
    Why in Spring's gladdest hours  
Now from field or from dell  
    I can pluck no more flow'rs ;

But I dream of that Spring  
    When together we two  
Gathered blossoms to string  
    In a chaplet for you.

Ah ! those dear days have fled,  
    Swift as shafts from a bow,  
And the chaplet is shed,  
    And love's fires have burn'd low.

But my lips may not tell  
    How grief weighs on my heart,  
Like some strange, evil spell  
    That will never depart.

*Translated by Rosa Newmarch.*

## COME TO ME

Come unto me when winds at night  
    Among the forest trees are sighing,  
And when the steppe, bereft of light,  
    Wrapp'd in a veil of sleep is lying.

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Come unto me when bright on high,  
Among the clouds the moon's in motion,  
Or when she makes the tranquil sky  
Seem like a calm gold-tinted ocean.

Come unto me when first-love yearns,  
When joy and rapture are awaking ;  
When youthful blood with ardour burns,  
And all my soul for thee is aching !

Come unto me, come once again,  
I long to know life's sweetest madness,  
Thy maiden heart I long to strain  
Unto my own, that throbs with gladness!

*Translated by Rosa Newmarch.*

### THE MOWER

I can't understand it,  
I can't make it out—  
Yet why can't I see  
How it all came about ?  
In an unlucky day,  
In an ill hour, alack,  
I came into this world  
With no shirt to my back !  
Yet my grand-dad's broad shoulders  
Are mine, as you see ;  
And my mother's deep chest ;  
In my cheeks flowing free  
Burns the blood of my sire,

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Like milk set afire  
By dawn's crimson light ;  
And my locks lie in clusters  
As black as the night.  
Yet, whatever I do—  
O, it never goes right !  
In an unlucky day,  
In an ill hour, alack,  
I came into this world  
With no shirt to my back !  
There's darling Grounioushka,  
The Stárosta's daughter—  
Well, all through the spring  
Did I patiently court her ;  
But he, the old churl,  
Was finely put out !  
To whom has he planned  
That he'll marry the girl ?  
O, I can't understand  
How it all came about.  
Does he think, the old ass,  
I was after his money ?  
Let him stick to his brass  
If he give me my honey—  
'Tis for *her* that I pine.  
O, her fair face is bright  
And as rosy as sunrise,  
Her rounded cheeks mellow,  
And the flash of her eyes  
Might drive a young fellow

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Clean out of his wits.  
Ah, 'twas only last night  
That she wept so for me,  
But her tears were in vain.  
For her Dad said downright  
That it never could be.  
Shall I never again  
From my sorrow be free?  
Come, I'll buy a new scythe,  
And I'll sharpen it well,  
Aye, its edge I will whet,  
Ere I bid a farewell  
To my own native place.  
Nay, Grounia, don't fret,  
Don't worry, dear maid,  
Though keen is the blade,  
I'll not cut myself down;  
Good-bye, little town.  
You, hard parent, good-bye!  
To a land far away  
Will the young mower hie.  
Down the Don's bank I'll stray  
Till I reach the quayside.  
Where the hamlets stand gay  
And the Steppe stretches wide,  
There, wherever I glance,  
The tall plume-grass is blown.  
O Steppe, thou, my own,  
How thy fertile expanse  
Lies green on each hand,

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So free and so vast,  
Till it reaches at last  
To the Black Sea's far strand.  
I have come as thy guest,  
But I come not alone,  
I have brought thee a friend,  
One, my closest and best.  
See, my sharp scythe is here,  
As myself he is dear.  
O, from end to far end,  
What a joy it will be  
To wander with him  
O'er the Steppe's grassy sea !

Swish, work away, shoulders ;  
Swing, arms, to and fro,  
While cool on my face  
The light southern winds blow,  
Refreshing and rippling  
The Steppe's endless space.  
Now, scythe, hum a song,  
Flash in circles thy blade ;  
How the long grass-ranks fall  
As the steel moves along !  
O, ye poor blossoms all,  
Your heads are low-laid !  
Ye must dry up and fade  
In the straight swaths of grass  
As my young heart, alas,  
Withers up for a maid,

## The Popular Poets

As I languish for Grounia !  
I'll rake up the hay  
Till so high my stack stands,  
That the wife of the Cossack  
Must pay with both hands.  
I shall sew up my pocket,  
My treasure to guard,  
Then, home I'll betake me,  
To the Stárosta say :  
“ Though tears could not make thee  
Give Grounia away,  
Thou art not so hard  
But my gold pieces may.”

*Translated by Rosa Newmarch.*

## NEKRASSOV

### IN THE VILLAGE

Hark ! has a club of the rook-folk, I pray you,  
Met to discuss our arrival to-night ?  
Croaks and wild groaning—enough to dismay  
you !  
Why, all the rooks of the world you'd suppose  
now  
Hither at even come flying—a sight !  
Squadron on squadron they come, and in rows  
now

## Poetry and Progress in Russia

Blacken the cross, on the cupola perch,  
Crowd in the belfry, and now on the lowly  
Roof of the peasant-hut nearest the church.  
Just the same thing happened yesterday—slowly  
Six settle down on the hedge, in the tree-top  
Two flap their wings, loudly cawing, and three  
drop  
Down on the roadway. 'Tis time, then, we  
started! . . .  
Thanks be to Heaven, the clouds have departed—  
Winds, too, have laid them . . . the field let us  
win.  
All in the marshy land, ever since drearily,  
Rainy and sunless the morning set in,  
I with my gun have been wandering wearily,  
Vainly though watchfully, wet to the skin.  
Evening . . . the rooks fly . . . and still is the  
weather,  
Now by the draw-well that stands in the way  
Two poor old gammers have met them to-  
gether—  
Come, let us listen and hear what they say. . . .

—Gossip, I greet thee!—How goes it, good  
kinswoman?  
Still art with anguish opprest?  
Still doth one thought, like a masterful house-  
holder,  
Lord it, poor soul, in thy breast?

## The Popular Poets

—How should I comfort me, wretched and sinful  
one?

Still the heart aches, day and night . . .

Dead, O Kassyànovna, dead, O thou kindly  
one,

Buried away from my sight!

Go for the brutes—but what else ever came of it?

Braver man never drew breath . . .

Forty the bears that he slew in the trapping-  
ground,

Forty and one was his death!

Tall, iron-handed, his shoulders—the breadth of  
them

Verily past all belief—

Dead, thou Kassyànovna, dead, thou poor soul of  
mine,

Thirty days old now my grief!

Woe's me!—The bearskin, they took it and sold  
it for

Seventy rubles, the whole

Price then was given in prayers for poor  
Tàvushka—

Heaven grant peace to his soul!

Màrya Romànovna paid for the funeral,

She, our good lady and kind—

Dead, thou dear heart of mine, dead, thou  
Kassyànovna,

Scarce the way home could I find. . . .

## Poetry and Progress in Russia

Saw how the wind shook the hut, how the  
granary  
Quickly to ruin must fall. . . .  
Where is my son? thought I, tottering crazily  
Homeward, he'll come at my call,  
Come with the axe (the poor axe, who will use it  
now?),  
Comfort me, feeble and old. . . .  
Dead, O Kassyànovna, dead, good my kins-  
woman,  
Dead . . . so the axe may be sold.  
Pity the aged one, who will caress her now?  
Well, she can beg—but it's hard!  
In the damp autumn, the cold of the winter-time,  
Who will bring wood to the yard?  
Who, to provide me a cloak of warm rabbit-  
skin,  
Think you, will take out his gun?  
Dead, O Kassyànovna, dead, thou dear heart of  
mine,  
Dead—and the shooting is done.

Trouble and sorrow now, woe for the truth of it!  
Darken my days as they pass.  
Wrapped as in winding-sheets, stretched on my  
resting-place,  
Wait I for Death, but, alas!  
Death has forgotten me—no one to care for me,  
Lone and complaining I go—

## The Popular Poets

Dead, thou Kassyànovna, dead, good my kins-woman!

Well, it was God willed it so. . . .

E'en though I live till the young grass is tall again,

Sickle and scythe can I wield?

No one to see to the roof of the cottage now,

No one to work in the field!

Soon to the city goes Màrya Romànovna,

Dwindles my strength day by day—

Dead, O dear heart of mine, dead, O Kassyànovna!

Think you he wished me to stay! . . .

Once more she weeps, but my pity is bootless:

I can do nothing! . . . Come, seek we our rest.

Wearied am I with my labour, though fruitless,

Come, for the night will be short at the best.

Early to-morrow the shooter they'll waken . . .

See, now the rooks are preparing to fly,

Ended, the meeting . . . "Attention!" and o'er us

All now arise with a clamour in chorus,

"Close up your ranks!" and their flight they have taken,

Naught but a ribbon of sable outshaken

Far between desert and sky. . . .

*Translated by H. C. F.*

## Poetry and Progress in Russia

### THE CONVICT'S SONG

Together, lads! For us there's work to do.  
They did not bring us here our hands to fold.  
Ah, not for nothing did the good God strew  
The lap of Mother-earth with seams of gold.

So while your hands can serve you, work away!  
Don't shirk, or lag, or grumble at your lot;  
Your grandsons will be grateful some fine day,  
When Russia's rich with all that we have got.

And while we work, without a break or rest,  
Let the hot sweat like water down us run,  
To freeze again on branded back and breast  
When sounds the bell the hour of labour done.

Endure to be by thirst or hunger racked,  
And cheerfully the winter hardships stand;  
Since every precious nugget we extract  
Will be of service to our Motherland.

*Translated by Rosa Newmarch.*

### ORINA, THE SOLDIER'S MOTHER

The day's sport was well over and, dead-beat,  
We trudged in silence through the autumn night  
Till, thank the Lord, the hut we sheltered in  
This time last year appeared, a welcome sight.

## The Popular Poets

“How are you, dame? You see we’ve come again.  
Why, what’s the matter, you seem sad to-day?  
If by some chance you’re thinking of your death,  
It is a useless thought—best put away.

“Are you in any trouble? Out with it!  
Let’s see if I can comfort you, good-wife.”  
And then, confiding, poor Orina told  
The great and bitter sorrow of her life.

“For eight long years I had not seen my boy.  
Was he alive or dead? No tidings, good  
Or bad, had reached me, and I lost all hope  
Of seeing him again, when—there he stood!

“He’d got himself discharged for good, the lad;  
And how his mother hustled in her joy  
To get the pancakes fried, the bath-house hot,  
While all the time her eyes devoured the boy!

“Alas! My happiness was all too short.  
My soldier laddie coughed and coughed all night:  
I saw it was a wreck they’d sent me home,  
Blood stained the handkerchiefs I washed so white.

“‘Ah, little mother, I shall soon be well,’  
He used to say; but still he did not mend.  
Nine days my Vania lingered on with me,  
And on the tenth—there came the bitter end.”

## Poetry and Progress in Russia

Orina said no more. Struck dumb with grief,  
She scarce would speak another word to me.  
“ Now tell me, mother, where your son had been  
And how he caught the fatal malady ?

“ Perhaps he had been sickly from his youth ? ”  
Orina’s eyes with indignation shone :  
“ Ivan was like the giants, sir, of old,  
A finer child you ne’er set eyes upon !

“ At Peter,<sup>1</sup> why the General himself  
Marvelled to see a lad so strongly made  
When to the board-room naked Ivan came  
With all the other conscripts to parade.

“ Quite single-handed, sir, he built our hut ;  
’Twas he himself who hewed the beams of pine.  
My Ivanoushka had a head of hair  
So fair and curly, and as fine as fine.”

And then, poor soul, her voice broke down again.  
“ Go on, good-wife, pour all your troubles out.  
How did your boy fall ill ? What’s this you say—  
You never asked him how it came about ? ”

“ He never cared to talk to me at all  
About his life in barracks, sir, and I  
Hold it a sin among the secret things  
That lie between a man and God to pry ;

<sup>1</sup> A common contraction of Petersburg.

## The Popular Poets

“ For gossip is displeasing to the Lord,  
And makes the evil one rejoice again,  
And we should keep our tongue from idle words,  
Nor ever of our enemies complain.

“ It is a Christian duty to forbear  
And unto death to suffer and be still.  
God only knows what grief it could have been,  
That broke down Vania’s health and made him ill.

“ I do not wish to judge a single soul ;  
I never sought to look into the past ;  
And through his dying days the words he spoke  
Were words of consolation to the last.

“ He took his axe and did a stroke of work ;  
He crept about the courtyard quietly ;  
Patched up the poor old hut and once contrived  
To fence the kitchen-garden, as you see.

“ He meant to give the shanty a new roof,  
But found the work too hard, although he tried ;  
He took to bed and ne’er got up but once,  
That was the very day before he died.

“ He longed to see the dear sun once again,  
And so I went with him to say farewell  
To all our little stock, sir, one by one,  
And to the bath-house and the farm beside.

## Poetry and Progress in Russia

“Then on into the field, where long he sat  
Half dreaming : ‘Good-bye, little field ! With joy  
I’ve mown you many a time when I was young,’  
And then he burst out crying, my poor boy.

“Just then upon the road we heard a song,  
And he joined in with all his voice’s strength ;  
‘No more the snow is white,’ the old song ran.  
He coughed, he seemed to choke—then fell full-length.

“His legs, once nimble, could not bear him now,  
And, ah, his poor head rolled from side to side.  
It took me full an hour to get him home—  
And once with any nightingale he vied !

“Ah, what a turn he gave me that last night !  
His wits were gone ; he raved like one insane ;  
Through all those dying hours he seemed to think  
That he was with the regiment again.

“He marched about ; he polished up his arms ;  
Pipe-clayed his belt and straps, and with his  
tongue  
He imitated all the bugle calls,  
And O, the wild and shameless songs he sung !

“He rattled down his rifle on the floor  
So hard the little cottage shook again ;  
He stretched out one leg, while he stood upright  
Upon the other—just like any crane.

## The Popular Poets

“I went to him, and soon he calmer grew  
And lay upon the bench. I strove to pray.  
Perhaps 'twould please the Lord to save him yet :  
His wits returned to him at break of day.

“He whispered : ‘Farewell, mother mine, fare-  
well.

Again I leave you all alone.’ Then I  
Bent low above my Vania’s dying form ;  
I signed him with the Cross and said ‘Good-bye.’

“And so his life burned low and flickered out,  
As dies the taper at the Ikon’s shrine.”  
Few words and simple ; but what depths of grief !  
Depths too profound for human sounding-line.

*Translated by Rosa Newmarch.*

### NIKITIN

#### THE GAFFER

Old Gaffer, with white beard and smooth bald  
head,

Sits in his chair.

His little mug of water, and his bread,  
Stand near him there.

Grey as a badger he : his brow is lined ;  
His features worn.

He’s left a world of care and care behind  
Since he was born.

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'Tis over now, his eyesight soon must go ;  
His strength is done.

Death laid within the churchyard long ago  
Grandchild and son.

A cat the smoke-grimed hut with Gaffer shares.  
Upon the stove

All day he sleeps. He too is old, nor cares  
From thence to move.

The old man still plaits shoes, with fingers slow,  
From bark of birch,

His wants are few, his greatest joy to go  
        Into God's church.

He stands within the porch, against the wall,  
    Muttering his prayers.

A loyal child, he thanks the Lord for all  
Life's griefs and cares.

Cheery he lives—with one foot in the grave—  
In his dark hole.

Whence does he draw the strength that keeps  
him brave,

Poor peasant soul?

*Translated by Rosa Newmarch.*

## The Popular Poets

### SUNSET AT VORONEZH

FROM "THE VILLAGE MONEY-LENDER"

The day dies out. Vast banks of cloud  
Obscure the golden-tinted sky,  
And fragrant mists begin to shroud  
The rills that in the valley lie.  
The pliant reeds around the lake  
A half-transparent rampart make.  
O'erhead, from time to time, a flight  
Of whistling curlews wing their way,  
Then all is still again. From sight,  
'Neath shelt'ring bushes hid away,  
The fisher's punt lies motionless.  
There, people to the ferry press ;  
While waggons in a slow team wind  
Adown the road, and close behind  
The waggoners follow, whip in hand.  
Now leisurely the boat puts out  
And moves off slowly from the land.  
The frightened horses plunge and paw  
To hear the boatmen's lusty shout,  
As through the stream the rope they draw.  
The votive shrine, the gatehouse old,  
The huts, the baths, the belfry high,  
Crowned with its bulb and cross of gold ;  
The hedges on the river's bank,  
The weeping willows in grey rank,  
Reversed to view, these things all lie

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Within the waters of the stream.  
And catching from afar some gleam  
Of clothes new-washed, the little bight  
Breaks into ripples edged with white.  
A pagan barrow, 'mid the steam  
Of rising vapours, half concealed,  
Stands high above the barren field.

*Translated by Rosa Newmarch.*

## KHOMIAKOV: A SLAVOPHIL POET

To a great many Russians—perhaps at the present moment to a large majority of them—it will seem mere perversity to include Khomiakov in a book which deals with the relations between poetry and progress in Russia. Judged from a very modern point of view, Khomiakov is not regarded as a great poet; while his optimistic—not to say visionary—outlook on the past and his distrust of foreign influence is thought to have kept him aloof from the main progressive current of his day. This estimation is, however, somewhat superficial. Khomiakov was not a great poet in the same sense as Poushkin, with whom he cannot compare as regards breadth of thought or perfection of formal structure; nor shall we find in his work the urgent, fiery passion of Lermontov, or the lyric charm and freshness of Koltsov. But in addition to its many literary qualities, we admire his poetry as the expression of a noble mind, lifted above the lyrical egotism which sings only of personal joy and sorrow by exalted

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emotions, religious and patriotic. It is difficult to think of Khomiakov as a popular poet. Such waves of enthusiasm for his work as have occasionally passed over Russian society must have been, at least so one imagines, rather the outcome of misconception than of genuine appreciation on the part of his admirers. The loftiness and austerity of his teaching and the uncompromising nature of his theological views can never have appealed to the bulk of erring humanity. His orthodoxy and fervent patriotism lent themselves to many uses, but the essence of Khomiakov's message could only reach those who, like himself, were penetrated through and through by the religious spirit. In this respect he is no more a popular poet than George Herbert. At the same time, although his work cannot be weighed in the balance with that of Poushkin, we may justly say that his thoughts are always lofty, that he invariably sings in his own voice, and that the music of his verse is well suited to the grave and noble themes which inspired him.

His right to a high place among the poets of Russia is far less a matter of debate than his claim to be linked with the intellectual and social advancement of his day. Yet this short study may serve to show that Khomiakov's teaching, demanding as it did from its followers the complete sacrifice of individual interests to those of

## Khomakov : A Slavophil Poet

the Church and the Commonwealth, was in the truest sense progressive, if taken in its highest intention and separated from the formalism and indolence of his false disciples. But admitting that Khomiakov has not as a poet the universality of Byron, Schiller, or Poushkin, and that his efforts to reform Russian society were based upon a return to tradition rather than upon an impulse towards Western culture, he still remains interesting as the sole poetic representative of one of the most remarkable movements in the history of his country : that tendency—so difficult and delicate of interpretation to those who have not much insight into the national temperament—which is comprised in the word *Slavophilism*.

To explain the nature of the Slavophil movement, it is necessary to look back at the social and intellectual conditions which prevailed in Russia early in the nineteenth century. In a previous essay I have already remarked upon the lack of anything approaching to systematic criticism in the earlier phases of Russian literature. During the first thirty years of the last century, side by side with a considerable and varied literary activity, the absence of leading ideas and party spirit is equally remarkable. Occasionally some limited social area had been agitated by a dispute between two unimportant literary cliques, but, generally speaking, men's intellectual and social interests were scattered, and tended to no

## Poetry and Progress in Russia

definite goal. This was evident in the journalism of the day, the newspapers taking the form of miscellanies, mere heterogeneous collections of articles without solidarity of views or aims. Poushkin's famous organ the *Contemporary* and the *Moscow Miscellany* (*Moskovsky Sbornik*) formed no exceptions to this rule. The literary circles of the time were united by ties of acquaintance and social intercourse rather than by a dominating party spirit. Therefore it was not unusual to find men of the most divergent opinions and temperaments meeting daily at the same houses and contributing to the same journals. Among these literary coteries, which were a feature of the social life of Moscow from about 1830 onward, the one which assembled at the house of Stankievich was the most remarkable for the men it attracted and the influence which it eventually wielded upon intellectual society. Stankievich welcomed such a strange medley of personalities and opinions as were embodied in Bielinsky, Constantine Aksakov, Herzen, and Katkov. This harmony in dissonance was quite characteristic of the early phases of social development in Moscow. Gradually, however, the differences of opinion became more accentuated and the discussions more heated, until Stankievich, Herzen, and the Slavophil Kireievsky became respectively the leaders of special cliques of their own.

## Khomakov : A Slavophil Poet

The split between individual members of Stankevich's circle finally led to the formation of two distinct schools of thought, whose disciples divided all thinking Russia, and were known as Westerns and Slavophils.

More than one theory has been formed as to the origin of the Slavophil tendency among the intellectual circles of Moscow. Some go back as far as the time of Peter the Great, and see in the *Rasskolniki*, or Old Believers, and subsequently in the rising of the Strelets and even in the fanaticism of the followers of Admiral Shishkov, the precursors of the Slavophil movement. Oursin, in his *Studies in the Psychology of the Slavs*, connects Slavophilism with the disastrous attempt of the Decembrists in 1825 to effect the constitutional reform of Russia. He points out how many young officers who had taken part in the campaigns of 1812-14 returned from Europe to experience profound dissatisfaction with the backward condition in which they found their own country. They began to dream of the reformation of Russia. But the events of the recent campaigns, while arousing the country to a consciousness of its power, also awoke among Russians a distrust of France and of Western Europe in general. The reforms therefore should not be imitated from other nations, they should come from within. We know how the projected reforms of the Decembrists came to naught, and

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how the plot ended in the death and exile of some of the brightest spirits in the land. The rising generation underwent a reaction against political tendencies, but the newly awakened patriotism had left its impress upon men's minds. The national idea was one of the chief topics of discussion amongst those who frequented Stankievich's house in Moscow. Thus, reasons Oursin, notwithstanding that the activities of the Decembrists were manifested in a very different way to those of Stankievich's circle, they had this much in common, "that both parties protested against the imperfect conditions of life which prevailed in Russia."

We must bear in mind, however, that the national idea was already exercising the minds of all cultured Europe, and a more obvious explanation of the origin of Slavophilism appears to lie in the immense attraction which the Hegelian philosophy had begun to exercise upon the literary circles in Moscow. Perhaps because of the reaction against practical politics to which I have just referred, the young intellects of the day were preoccupied with these philosophical abstractions to an extent which seems incomprehensible to a more practical generation.

It was not surprising that these questions should gradually make their way to Russia and arouse the interest of the eager young intellects who gathered around Stankievich. But the way in

## Khomiakov : A Slavophil Poet

which a section of Russian society adapted Hegel's conception of the national idea to their own country was curiously characteristic and led to strange results. The soil had been already prepared. The craze for everything foreign which had been so marked a feature of the reign of Catharine II had given place to an ultra-patriotic enthusiasm. Amongst those who discussed Hegel's philosophy in Moscow there were several young men who had been brought up to regard their native land in the light of this exalted patriotism. Hegel formulated the idea that while most of the nations reflected the extremes upon which their ideals had been wrecked in course of development, there still existed a Nation-elect, destined to reconcile all these failures in a great reconstructive synthesis. He assumed that this lofty role in history would fall to the lot of Germany. "If Hegel, the leader of philosophical thought in Europe, was capable of such national bias," says Skabichevsky, "how much more so must have been that circle of young Russian philosophers accustomed to look upon their own country as uniting all perfections."<sup>1</sup> Was it not easy to carry this ardent patriotism a step further and regard Russia as equally pre-destined to fulfil the great regenerative mission which Hegel assigned to Germany?

<sup>1</sup> *History of Modern Russian Literature.* A. M. Skabichevsky. St. Petersburg, 1900.

## Poetry and Progress in Russia

Here, then, we have the origin of the Slavophil movement as it was first manifested in Stankievich's circle. This was the burning question which divided this coterie—and eventually all Russia—into two hostile camps : is our native land actually capable of assuming this exalted place among the nations? Men who had for a time been closely associated in intellectual intercourse now became divided without prospect of reunion. Stankievich with Bielinsky—who migrated from Moscow to Petersburg in 1837—Granovsky, Herzen, and a few others constituted themselves the supporters of Western culture ; the brothers Ivan and Peter Kireievsky, Constantine Aksakov, and Khomiakov formed the opposition, devoting their entire energy to the defence of the Panslavonic idea, but above all to the justification of Russia as the Nation-elect.

This discord was very shortly to be aggravated by the publication of the famous letter addressed by Tchaadaiev to *The Telescope*, which led to the suppression of that organ, and the exile of the editor, N. I. Nadejdin.

Tchaadaiev was one of the many dissatisfied spirits seeking for the cause of Russia's backward development. He regarded all traditions of national culture with scepticism and contempt, not because, like Bielinsky and Herzen, he was attracted to German culture and philosophy, but

## Khomiakov : A Slavophil Poet

because he was convinced that in Russia's separation from the Papal unity lay the true reason for her isolation and impeded growth. His cynical denial of all that the patriotic party held most sacred provoked from them in retaliation much of that merciless and biased criticism of Western institutions which is an unpleasant feature of some writers of the Slavophil school.

But Tchaadaiev's Romanist point of view was quite exceptional in Russia. It irritated the devout adherents of the Orthodox Church, but only for the time being. The keenest and most protracted conflict continued to be waged between the Westerns and the Slavophils on quite other lines. The former were prepared to admit that Russia might be capable of fulfilling the role of Nation-elect, because her historic past was merely a blank sheet which would enable her to enter upon her mission unhampered by the traditions which weighed upon the countries of Western Europe.

The insinuation that their country's past was merely *tabula rasa* was particularly unacceptable to the patriotic pride of the Slavophils, who retorted that Russia was specially fitted to realise the Hegelian ideal because her social and historical traditions were precisely in conformity with it. Henceforward all their efforts were directed towards strengthening this argument. To prove the existence of these historical traditions, and to deduce from them some guiding

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principle for the future development of the country, became the leading aim of Khomiakov and his fellow-workers. Although the historical researches of this school were not always conducted in a scientific and perfectly impartial spirit, yet incidentally they were most beneficial, because they were practically the first attempts of the kind, and led to the formation of a sounder school of history, of which Soloviev is perhaps the greatest representative.

Skabichevsky has pointed out that, like the adherents of the Stuarts in England, the Jacobins in France, and indeed almost all the upholders of divine election all the world over, the Slavophils were almost exclusively men of high birth and culture. The earliest leaders of the movement were the brothers Kireievsky, descendants of an aristocratic family, and greatly influenced in early life by the poet Joukovsky, to whom they were related. Ivan Kireievsky, who completed his education in Germany, started his literary career as a pioneer of Western thought. In 1831 he edited *The European* (*Europeyets*), having amongst his colleagues Joukovsky, Baratinsky, Khomiakov, and A. I. Tourgeniev. But in February of the following year the paper was suppressed on account of an article from Kireievsky's own pen, entitled "The Nineteenth Century," and only the intervention of Joukovsky saved the writer from sharing Nadejdin's fate.

## Khomiakov : A Slavophil Poet

As it was, Kireievsky took the matter so deeply to heart that he abstained from all literary activity for several years. When he began to write again his views had undergone a radical change. This was partly due to the influence of his brother Peter, who, less talented as a writer than Ivan, was an accomplished linguist, known as the translator of Washington Irving's *Life of Mahomet*, and as one of the earliest collectors of Russian folk songs. But an even stronger influence in the life of Ivan Kireievsky was exercised by Philaret, an ascetic monk of the Novospasky Monastery. Kireievsky had the true Slavonic temperament, which in its impatience for the realisation of an idea so often falls into disenchantment and the complete negation of all belief. Kireievsky, however, after his loss of faith in Western systems and institutions, found peace of mind within the fold of the Orthodox Church. One of his most important contributions to journalism, after his conversion to the Slavophil point of view, was his letter to Count Komarovsky, entitled "The Character of European culture and its relation to that of Russia," which appeared in the *Moscow Miscellany* (1854). This was followed by a second period of inactivity, from which he roused himself at the conclusion of the Crimean War, when he published an article in *Russian Talk* (*Russkaya Besseda*) upon "The possibility and

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necessity of a fresh point of departure in philosophy." Ivan Kireievsky died of cholera in 1856.

Constantine Aksakov, another leader of the Slavophil party, was the eldest son of Sergius Aksakov, a writer who earned a considerable reputation by his naturalistic sketches of Russian life.<sup>1</sup> Born in the village of Aksakov, in the Government of Orenburg, Constantine spent his boyhood in the country, coming daily in contact with the peasantry, for whom in after-life he cherished a warm affection, estimating their moral worth far above that of the educated classes. His earliest teacher and most intimate companion was his father, with whom he afterwards lived in Moscow. Shortly after leaving the University Aksakov became acquainted with Stankievich, and took part in the discussions which were carried on at his house. He was also actively engaged in journalism. At twenty-one he went abroad, but could not endure this voluntary exile for more than a few months. On his return he became closely united in sympathies and opinions with Khomiakov and the Kireievskys, and ended by being the most exclusive, and almost bigoted, of all the Slavophil circle. Several of his articles dealing with popular life in Russia appeared in the *Moscow Miscellany*, but his literary activity,

<sup>1</sup> *Reminiscences of an Angler*, *A Sportsman's Memoirs*, and *A Family Chronicle*.

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like that of his colleagues, was brought to a sudden standstill in 1852, when the journal was suppressed and the contributors came under police supervision. With the succession of Alexander II the iron-handed censorship which prevailed under Nicholas I was relaxed, and Aksakov became one of the founders of the new paper *Russian Talk* (*Russkaya Besseda*), and in 1857 edited the weekly journal *Molva* (*Rumour*). While Khomiakov devoted himself chiefly to theological questions, Aksakov was more occupied with history; but his intense, fanatical love of Moscow, and all that concerned the "mother town" of Russia, served to narrow his outlook, and his criticisms upon the reforms of Peter the Great would awake more sympathy if they showed less local prejudice. At the height of his activity he sustained a crushing blow in the death of his father. Aksakov had few human affections. He led a life of such austerity that he might have been actually within the cloister walls. His affection for his father was so profound that he never recovered from his loss. Insomnia and mental depression so undermined his former athletic physique that he went into a decline, and died six months later in the island of Zante.

Constantine Aksakov's younger brother, Ivan, also followed the journalistic career, and was editor in succession of *Russian Talk*, *The Day*, *Moskva*, and other papers, which all suffered under the

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censorship—for it is a curious fact that the Slavophils were regarded with suspicion by the Government whose cause they actually served. Ivan Aksakov was an admirable speaker as well as a writer of considerable power, and was useful to his party in both capacities. He spoke frequently at the meetings of the Slavonic Committee, especially during those years of stress which coincided with the movement among the Serbs and the Russo-Turkish War. In 1878 the warmth of his oratory led to the suppression of the society and his hasty retreat from Moscow. Some months elapsed before he ventured to return to his home and his occupations. Early in his career Ivan Aksakov was a frequent contributor of verse to the Slavophil Press. In more mature years he gave up this branch of letters, being convinced, as he himself puts it, that he had “neither the creative gift, the grace, nor the musical expression necessary for a true poet.” In this decision he showed commendable discretion. He died in 1886.

Undoubtedly the brightest, most fervent, and gifted spirit among the Slavophils was Alexis Stepanovich Khomiakov. The poet of the Slavophil cause was born in Moscow, May 1st, (old style), 1804, and was descended on both sides from the old aristocracy, his mother being connected with the Kireiev family. Biographical details concerning Khomiakov are somewhat

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scanty, but such as have been given to the world reveal a nature austere, exquisitely refined, capable of the most generous enthusiasm, and interpenetrated by a devout religious spirit. His reverence for tradition and his passionate attachment to his native land seem to have grown up in him from his earliest childhood. Such loyal, clean-living, chivalrous, patriotic types existed also among our own high Tory gentlefolk in the first half of the last century. They, too, shared this reverence for Church and State, and the instinctive desire to keep the traditions of the past unsullied by the contamination of cosmopolitan influences. But in their respective attitudes to the people, the Englishman of county family and conservative convictions and such a Slavophil as Khomiakov differed entirely. The Russian looked upon the peasantry without any trace of that spirit of haughty—even if benevolent—patronage which characterised the English landowner. In all his writings Khomiakov shows a keen feeling for community of interests and unity of sentiment. He may in a certain sense be called a Socialist. He set the people above the cultivated minority because they seemed to him, as it were, the reliquary which held intact the spirit of the past and the faith of his forefathers. His attachment to the old capital, Moscow, was as deep as, though less narrow than that of Aksakov. At eleven years of age,

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being taken on a visit to St. Petersburg, he felt ill at ease in what seemed to him the heathenish and outlandish atmosphere of the city. His religious sentiment was equally strong, and at eighteen, fired by what he heard of the sufferings of the orthodox Greeks at the hands of the Turks, he wished to leave home and hasten to the aid of a nation whose faith was identical with his own. This is perhaps the reason why on completing his university career he joined a regiment of cuirassiers stationed at Novo-archangelsk, in the Chersonese Government. He was accompanied hither by his father, who wished to commend the youth personally to his future colonel. Count Osten-Saken treated Khomiakov like a son, and has left the following sympathetic account of the young soldier-poet :—

“As regards physical, intellectual, and religious training Khomiakov was almost unique. His education had been remarkable, and in the whole course of my life I never met any one to equal him at this immature age. What a lofty appreciation of poetry! He did not follow the contemporary taste for emotional poetry. He cared for all that was moral, spiritualised, and exalted. He was a splendid horseman and could clear an obstacle as high as a man. He did excellent work in his squadron. His strong will dominated both old and young. He was a devout member of the Orthodox Church, and attended every

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service on Sundays and Saints' Days. At that time there already existed many free-thinkers who scoffed at the idea of fulfilling the rites of the Church, declaring that they were only instituted for the lower orders. But Khomiakov inspired such universal affection and respect that no one ventured to interfere with his convictions. He spared himself none of the hardships of his profession, and declined to avail himself of permission to wear a light steel cuirass instead of the heavy iron ones then in use, although he was somewhat slightly built and delicate in appearance. He bore physical suffering with patience and Spartan endurance."

After serving for a year under Osten-Saken, Khomiakov was transferred to a regiment of life-guards. At this time the political unrest which led to the Decembrist plot was a strong influence in the military world of St. Petersburg, but it left Khomiakov untouched. He went abroad in 1821 and again in 1826, and during these tours visited the western Slavonic countries and made a long stay in Paris, where he studied painting and completed his tragedy *Yermak*.<sup>1</sup> In 1829 he volunteered for the war between Greece and Turkey, and for that purpose took service in a hussar regiment. Thus, for the time being, the poet of orthodoxy and Slavophilism served

<sup>1</sup> The soldier of fortune who conquered Siberia for the Russians.

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under the same banner as Byron, who never had for Khomiakov any of the fascination which he exercised upon so many young Russians through the medium of Poushkin and Lermontov. After this campaign Khomiakov retired from the army and devoted the rest of his life to literary work and the propaganda of his patriotic and religious principles. He died of cholera in 1860.

His mental activity now centred upon one aim : to evolve from the study of Russian history a guiding principle for the development of the nation. Articles from his pen, upon questions historical and theological, now began to appear with frequency in various Moscow journals. It was his earnest endeavour to combine in his writing warmth and ardour of sentiment with a balanced judgment. As might be expected, being human, he often failed to hold fiery patriotism and religious ecstasy in a leash of cool analytical reasoning. Yet it must be conceded that he was more impartial and took wider views than his fellow-workers. Ivan Kireiev became a Slavophil as the result of disillusionment, followed by a severe spiritual conflict. His was a case of conversion. Constantine Aksakov dwelt apart with his great love for Moscow, as a monk in his cell with his vow of chastity, and the narrowing influences of such an existence are reflected in the prejudiced spirit in which he views all the innovations of Peter the Great and the Petersburg

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tendencies in general. "Khomakov only," says Oursin, "knew the right way to love his country and believe in its great future destiny." For he was not blinded by patriotic sentiment. He saw with a clear and pitiless vision all that was unworthy in the social life of Russia, and—unlike many who called themselves his disciples—he did not spare to rebuke evil. In this fervent and loyal faith—to quote once more from Oursin—"lies the secret of that mysterious and irresistible prestige felt by every one who takes pains to penetrate his thoughts."

Khomakov's greatest prose work, *Notes on Universal History*, was only published after his death, under the editorship of Hilferding. These notes are not a series of extracts and annotations, but rather a long intellectual memoir, which forms a fairly logical exposition of the leading idea of the author's whole life: the primary importance of religion from the historical point of view as setting its special, distinguishing stamp upon the evolution of society and national tendencies.

Khomakov believed that the States of Western Europe were based upon three elements: Rome, Christianity, and the barbarians.

Rome endowed the Western world with a new religion—the religion of law and social contracts—which assured the development of material existence without satisfying the spiritual needs of humanity.

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With regard to the second factor in the evolution of Western Europe, he asserted that the Romans never grasped the true spirit of Christ's teaching. Constantine accepted the new faith in the hope that it might infuse fresh life into a decadent State. But the seed of the Gospel fell upon uncongenial soil. Still more fatal was the error of Theodosius in proclaiming Christianity the religion of the State, for, argues Khomiakov, it is not the State, but only the Christian community, which can profess Christianity. Theodosius, a decadent Roman, was incapable of the lofty conception of a personal faith, of voluntary conversion, and of a communion of saints, welded together by unity of conviction and aim. He imagined that the faith could only flourish under the patronage of the Civil State, a mistake which made itself felt through all the subsequent ages, since it led first of all to the subjection of the Church to the State, and consequently to the efforts of the former to acquire independence and power—in a word, to Papal autocracy and a subservient priesthood. Meanwhile the ideals of humanity tended towards totally different institutions, for the Church should not be created in the image of the State, but rather the State should be reformed upon the pattern of the Church.

Passing to the third factor in the development of Western society, Khomiakov takes the view

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that the barbarians who succeeded to the Roman territories found them all imbued with that spirit of rationalism characteristic of Roman civilisation, therefore not only were these States founded upon conquest, but they suffered from the twofold division between Church and State and State and people, in consequence of being divided into classes which were hostile to each other's interests. Herein he discovers the cause of the frequent wars and revolutions which have agitated Western Europe, not only during the Middle Ages, but even in recent years.

Khomakov considered the Byzantine civilisation to be the direct continuation of that of ancient Greece. The immemorial intellectual activity of Greece had never actually suffered an interruption. Notwithstanding the impotence of the State, the people, having remained remote from Roman centralisation, had preserved their spiritual vigour and independence. The difference between the western and eastern halves of the Roman Empire was clearly demonstrated by their respective political fates ; while Rome had not sufficient vitality to resist the encroachments of the barbarians for a single century, the descendants of the ancient Greeks had withstood all outward aggression for nearly a thousand years, and not a man but preferred death to the yoke of the barbarian or infidel.

In the same way, the Greeks had accepted

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Christianity in a totally different spirit to the Romans. It was, as it were, the final phase in the development of Greece, not forced upon them from without, but issuing from the innermost recesses of their spiritual life. They demanded from it not merely an official creed, but a faith clearly and logically defined. Hence the eternal theological disputes which aroused derision in Western Europe, but were actually indications of the higher spiritual development of the Greeks.

In his justification of the Slav races, and of Russia in particular, Khomiakov lays stress upon a special characteristic which has been commented upon alike by the Roman and Byzantine historians: their peaceful proclivities and preference for agricultural pursuits rather than for military glory. Linked to this general sentiment is the historical fact that during the earlier stages of their social development they possessed nothing which corresponded to the feudal aristocracy of Western Europe. According to the Slavophil theory propounded by Aksakov, all European States were founded upon conquest. At their root lay serfdom, constraint, and animosity. The Russian State was based upon the voluntary acknowledgment of power in the person of Michael Romanov. At the root of it, therefore, lay independence, peace, and goodwill. Consequently the relationship between "the land and the State"—as Aksakov puts it—started from

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quite a different basis to that which existed in other lands. The people supported the State by the payment of taxes and served in the army in case of need. They formed one great commune, to which the rule of the State was necessary in order that they might lead their independent existence and preserve intact their faith and primitive institutions. The Tsar was the chief defender of the land, the people, and the communal principle; but, at the same time, under this supreme rule, the people governed themselves, choosing their own Starosts and other official representatives. From time to time the Tsar convened such popular assemblies as the *Vech*, or the *Zemsky Sabor*,<sup>1</sup> on which occasion the representatives of the people had the right to make themselves heard. This right did not carry any power to effect legislation, and amounted merely to an indication of popular opinion: "these are our views, if it please the Emperor to accept them." Between the head of the State and the people there was neither contract nor guarantee. "So much the better," cries the Utopian Aksakov, "contracts are evil things. The ideal, and moral conviction, are alone strong and binding."

According to the Slavophil point of view, this ideal and Arcadian condition of things suffered a

<sup>1</sup> The popular assembly was called the *Vech* during the Kiev period, and the *Zemsky Sabor* during the Moscow period.

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violent shock from the arbitrary reforms of Peter the Great, who severed the peaceful connections between the land and the State and violated the communal principle by refusing to hear the voice of the *Zemstvo* and by forcing upon the nation institutions alien to its traditions and temperament.

This historical point of view contains a germ of ideal truth, overlaid by much that is fantastic and wanting in fairness of vision. Every one who has studied, even superficially, the social and political history of Russia must have been struck by the admirable and enlightened theories on which many of her laws and institutions are based. But the suggestion that before the time of Peter the Great, Russia was an idyllic country, guided by a benevolent guardian whose chief care was the preservation of the communistic principle, is a piece of casuistry scarcely worthy of an historian who has a just cause to uphold. There are too many instances before this period which prove clearly enough that the absence of guarantee between the head of the State and the people, however beautiful in theory, has generally been to the disadvantage of the latter whenever they have made an effort to enlarge their liberty.

But although certain historical verdicts pronounced by the Slavophils are untrustworthy and purely speculative, their admiration for the sim-

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plicity and peaceful tendency of Russian life was absolutely sincere. Paradoxical as it may seem, their teaching is impregnated with a vital democratic spirit. Constantine Aksakov, calling attention to what he regards as the particular virtues of his compatriots, says :—

“ Russian history, compared with that of Western Europe, is the despair of those accustomed to histrionic pose. It contains no pompous phrases, no grandiose effects, no sumptuous decorative settings such as dazzle us in Western history. Individuals have played comparatively small parts in the pages of Russian history, for pride is the indispensable attribute of personalities, and pride with its glittering allurements is not one of our characteristics. We can point to no chivalry with all its glamour and bloodshed ; to no inhuman religious propagandas ; to no crusades—in short, to none of these continual scenic effects and dramatic situations.”

From these reflections Khomiakov deduced the following argument :—

“ If there be a brotherhood of nations, a sense of truth and justice—not a mere impalpable shadow, but something vital and enduring—then the moral supremacy does not belong to Germany, with her military and aristocratic ideals, but to the plebeian and agricultural Slavs.”

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Such, briefly resumed, were the leading ideas of the Slavophils. It is now time to come to the reflection of these views in Khomiakov's lyrical poetry.

As might be expected from what we have learnt of the man's character and lifelong pre-occupations, the ordinary themes of love, personal ambition, regret, and disillusionment are almost untouched by Khomiakov. The romanticism of the German school, the individualism of Byron, had no influence upon him. He sang not of himself, but of a cause. "The weak yearnings of love," as he puts it in his *Elegy*, written at the age of thirty, he already held in contempt. A deep melancholy runs through many of his poems, but it springs from discouragement at the imperfections and backslidings of his beloved people, rather than from the pessimism born of loss of faith or satiety. When he cries out upon his country that she is "full of evil, flattery, and corruption; unjust to the poor, stamped with the brand of slavery, and sunk in incorrigible sloth," it is not the bitter, railing tone of Nekrassov that we hear, but rather an echo of that sad and reproachful voice which said: "Jerusalem, thou that stonest the prophets."

It is a remarkable fact, as Oursin has pointed out, that very few of his poems express his joyous faith in the regenerative mission of Russia. It seems as though his poetry was not the entire

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expression of his nature, but rather an outlet for his feelings of weariness and depression. A beautiful and characteristic example of his verse is *The Well-spring* (1830), in which he dreams that from the heart of his native land issues a clear fountain of living waters, unseen and ignored, a secret and vital force ; but the hour is at hand when, overflowing its narrow limits, the spring will spread into a mighty river, reflecting the blue heavens in its broad waters and destined to illuminate the world with its light of love and peace.

But Khomiakov was no mere optimistic dreamer. He saw only too well how far Russia still was from the realisation of that glorious future that he believed would be hers. She herself was delaying the coming of this millennium. Therefore it is against her apathy and self-satisfaction that he most frequently fulminates. "Pity me, ye who have no dreams," he cries in an ironic outburst, "for is it not better to slumber free from importunate ideals—to rest, if only for the time being?"

Khomiakov had a true feeling for nature, but, unlike many of the romantic poets of his time, he did not see in sublime scenery merely a setting for the drama of his own passions. "I should not care," he says, indulging probably in a satirical reference to the "Byroniac" school, "to wander o'er the steppe, without purpose or hope, to mark

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the weary passage of the days, and steep my soul in solitude and silence." The contemplation of nature often restored him to serenity and peace of mind in those moments when he was painfully conscious of being a prophet without honour; but he always returned refreshed and strengthened to the great work of his life—the development of an intelligent patriotism based upon Christianity and the Orthodox Church.

Very often his poetry breathes a spirit of true humility, when, "humbled to the dust, with lamentations and tears" he realises his unworthiness to speak to the people, and prays that God may raise up a prophet, ardent of soul and strong of voice, who shall carry the divine message to the very heart of the nation.

Prayer, and the love of nature in the Wordsworthian spirit, were the two forces which enabled Khomiakov to keep a more perfect balance of mind than most of his colleagues, and to become reconciled to the actualities of life in a sense never achieved by Poushkin, Lermontov, or Nekrassov. In testimony of this attitude of dignified resignation we have his fine poem *The Labourer* :—

I go to fulfil in the sweat of my brow  
The task Thou hast ordained for me,  
I will not close mine eyes in slumber,  
Nor falter in the strife.

## Khomakov : A Slavophil Poet

I will not quit the plough, nor like an idle serf  
Turn back therefrom,  
Till I have traced the furrows  
Wherein, O Lord, Thy seed is sown.

The poems "Scorn not Belgrade" and "Kiev," which will be found at the end of this essay, are both embodiments of the Panslavonic idea. But perhaps none of his verses resume so completely the spirit of his poetry as the following quatrain, written in Glinka's album while on a visit to Prague. These lines take the form of a prayer for Russia.

Do not grant her a slavish peace,  
Do not send her blind arrogance,  
And the spirit of death, the spirit of doubt,  
Let these be extinguished in her spiritual life.

Finally, by way of justification for having linked the name of Khomiakov with the social progress of Russia, let me quote a few lines from a popular author whose views are generally distinguished by good sense and impartiality. "We should be wrong," says Skabichevsky, "in regarding the Slavophils as blind upholders of the *status quo*. Every legitimate reform had their sympathy, from the liberation of the serfs to the emancipation of women. They were the pioneers in the study of the ideals and customs of the people, and they were also the first to protest against the haughty and supercilious tone which characterised the literature of the fifties. . . . Their whole teach-

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ing was impregnated with noble and humane ideals which were carried in the atmosphere and helped to regenerate the social life of Russia."

In so far as Slavophilism has accentuated the incompatibility of temperament between Russia and Western Europe, it has probably done something to alienate the sympathy of the great majority who are too indolent to bridge over international prejudice by the help of study and observation ; but in so far as it awoke the conscience of the Russian nation, stayed the flood of insipid cosmopolitanism which threatened to extinguish the national genius, and called attention to the need of gathering up the traditions of the historic past, it has done a noble work for Russia. Slavophilism has not yet ceased to be an active influence in the country, therefore the poet of this movement, in spite of his reverence for tradition, cannot be said to stand aloof from the line of progress and social development.

# Khomakov : A Slavophil Poet

## KHOMIAKOV

Scorn not Belgrade, thou, O Praga,  
Pride of all Moravian homes,  
Scorn not Vyshgorod, O Moscow,  
City of the glittering domes !

We were children of one mother,  
Eaglets from one lofty nest.  
Brothers—brotherly embrace them,  
Fold them closely, breast to breast.

Nevermore let him the stronger,  
To the end who bore him well,  
Shame the weaker one who wavered  
In the long, long fight, and fell !

Troubles are but test and trial—  
He who fell—shall rise anew !  
God's forgiveness is not measured,  
Neither are His mercies few.

Lo, the darkness yields to sunlight !  
Side by side and hand in hand—  
In the morning long-expected—  
See the brother nations stand !

All are free and all are mighty,  
On their lips one triumph-song—  
One in purpose, high, exalted,  
One in Faith, behold them strong !

*H. C. F.*

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### KIEV

Before me rises old Kiev on the Dnieper. The Dnieper under the hill flashes its silver flood.

Hail to thee, thou ancient Kiev! Cradle of Russian glory! Hail to thee, swift Dnieper, baptismal river of Russia!

The sound of hymns comes softly; the angelus is heard beneath the heavens: Whence come ye, O pilgrims, to worship?

I come from the lands of the slow-flowing Don, the pride of the steppes; I from the country where roll the vast floods of Ensisseï.

My home is on the mild coast of the Euxine; and mine is on the shores of those far lands where eternal frost holds the ocean in thrall.

The wild and forbidding Ataï, land of perpetual snow—there is my birthplace; my home is in ancient Pskov.

I come from cold Ladoga; I from the blue waves of the Neva; I from the banks of the Dvina; I from our Mother Moscow.

Hail to thee, O Dnieper! Hail to thy silver-grey waters!

Hail to thee, Kiev, city of miracles! The silent shades of thy crypts are more beautiful than the palaces of the Tsar.

## Khomakov : A Slavophil Poet

We know how in past ages, in the night of antiquity, in the profound darkness, the dawn of the Light Eternal broke upon thee for Russia.

And now, from distant lands, from steppes unknown, from deep rivers of the north, thy children crowd back to pray.

Behold us around thy sanctuary, all gathered together in love.

Brothers, where are the sons of Volhynia? Galich, where are thy children?

Woe, woe! They have been burnt upon the cruel pyres of the Poles, they have been lured and led astray by the riotous feasts of the Poles.

The sword and lies, perfidy and fire, have robbed us of them; they follow a strange banner, they obey another voice.

Awake, O Kiev, call home thy erring children. Sweet is the voice of a father, the voice of prayer and love.

When thy children who have been led away shall hear thy call, they will straightway break the chains of evil, they will forget the strange banner.

Once more, as in the past, they will find consolation in thy holy bosom, in thy paternal shelter. Around the flag of our land they will press on to the life of the spirit, to the spirit of life, regenerated by thee.

*Rosa Newmarch.*

## NADSON : A POET OF THE DECADENCE

THE influence of poetry in Russian literature did not wane as the century advanced. On the contrary, from 1870 onward, something like a craze for verse dominated society. Nothing in the book world sold so readily as a volume of poetry, and a swarm of poetasters sprang up who asked nothing better than to satisfy the public taste. It will be remembered that this *schwärmerei* coincided with a similar impulse in England. But whereas here a great deal of our minor poetry of the seventies and eighties was of remarkable quality, few of the Russian aspirants to fame could boast of more than mediocre talent. Nevertheless a few of these younger poets attained to a well-merited popularity, because they expressed in more or less graceful verse the spirit of the hour, its pessimism and disenchantment. By far the most gifted of this group was Nadson, a young poet of Jewish origin.

Among the too brief records of those whom the gods have loved, it would be hard to find a



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more pathetic story than that of Nadson, the counterpart, as regards destiny, of our English Keats, although in character and genius they had not much in common. Not to Keats, in truth, is Nadson so closely allied as to a clear group of ill-starred poets numbering some of the choicest spirits of the nineteenth century and perhaps the most typical of its dominant mood. His pessimism, like that of Leopardi and Novalis on the Continent, and of James Thomson ("B. V.") and Philip Bourke Marston in England, was temperamental rather than philosophic, and was bound up with those personal elements of tragedy which seemed to constitute their fate. Ill-health and hereditary melancholia, bitter bereavement and unfortunate love, gave a peculiar sadness to their poetry and added compassion to our interest in their lives. On Nadson's path the clouds gathered earlier still, and the strokes of affliction fell with more cruel rapidity. A lonely childhood gave place to a fleeting period of youthful happiness, too soon overshadowed by the loss of an only and beloved friend. The brief years of his manhood were almost a martyrdom, spent as they were in an unsuitable profession which entailed constant physical and moral suffering ; while his premature death—just as he reached the forecourts of the temple of Fame—was embittered by the attacks of an unscrupulous enemy. Added to all this, the fact that his life,

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from the first, was darkened by the shadow of inherited disease, and we have the tragedy common to so many poets repeated in still more sombre colours, because enacted in an even more sensitive and less buoyant frame.

Simon Yakovlevich Nadson was born in St. Petersburg, December 26th, 1862. The poet's father, who was of Jewish descent, died in a lunatic asylum before the boy had reached his third year. His mother came of an aristocratic Russian family, and was as remarkable for her beauty as for her sincere and sympathetic disposition. After her husband's death, finding herself in straitened circumstances, she took a situation as governess-housekeeper in a rich family in Kiev.

Of the poet's childhood not much is known. A few of his earliest impressions, jotted down in later years, were found among his papers after death. "When I recall my childhood, the first thing I remember is the little wing of our house in Kiev. Friendly and snug, it had all sorts of additions built on here and there, and an enclosure from the wood, beyond which stretched a bare space covered with rank grass, spurge, pyrethrums, and wormwood. In its low rooms, with the big clumsy stoves, the flowers in the curtained windows, the cheap papers, and ugly, but solid and comfortable furniture, I spent my first years. . . . Later on I remember staying in the country, on the estate belonging to the family in which my

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mother was governess. My fancy conjures up the old neglected garden with the two adjoining dykes ; the ponds, the crisp, green birch trees, the willows, oaks, and limes, and the conical tops of the Lombardy poplars. I see the narrow paths overgrown with scented shrubs, jasmine and sweet-brier, and interlaced with lithe, bright green branches overhead. I remember a little hollow full of nettles. In my solitary childish games these plants always represented the Tatar hordes, and armed with a wooden sword I used to fling myself upon the enemy and, regardless of stings, slash them right and left until, tired out, I would stretch myself on the thick grass beside the sunlit pool and lie there, lazily listening to the monotonous bell-like croaking of the frogs and the incessant chirping of the grasshoppers. Down in the grass everything was living its own wonderful life. I would try to put myself in the place of some beautiful giant-ant climbing the stalk of a graceful campanula, and to see the world from her point of view. . . . Thus I developed my imagination."

When Nadson was seven his mother went to live with a brother in St. Petersburg. Here the boy was sent to a preparatory class for the classical gymnasium, and gave signs of great promise. But his schooling was soon interrupted by his mother's second marriage, which necessitated her return to Kiev. This marriage proved

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more disastrous than the first. After a brief period of wedded life her husband committed suicide in a sudden fit of insanity, leaving her worse off than before, with the added burden of ill-health and shattered nerves.

But although broken in health, her courage was indomitable. Once more she returned to Petersburg and tried to earn her living as assistant teacher in a school kept by her sister. When she became aware of the inevitable approach of death, the question of Simon's education weighed upon her mind. Her brother offered to use his influence to get the boy into the Military School, where he would receive free board and education. The mother realised too well all that a delicate and hypersensitive child would suffer in such unsuitable surroundings. But her poverty left her no alternative. With many misgivings she forced herself to accept the offer. "All my life," wrote the poet in later days, "the thing I dreaded most has invariably befallen me. My mother could always frighten me out of my childish fits of naughtiness by threatening to send me into a cadet-corps. All kinds of horrors had been told me about it. Imagine, then, with what feelings I—a weakly, nervous child of eleven—entered those inhospitable portals."

The mother suffered from this separation even more acutely than the boy, because she knew

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their supreme parting could not be long delayed. As the end drew near, fearing the effect of such a sorrow upon his extreme and passionate sensibility, she resolutely refused the comfort of his presence at the last. The poet was not even told of his mother's death. "That day I got leave, and ran home, meaning to surprise her at dinner—and found I was alone! All alone in this 'white world.'" In after-life the poet enshrined the intense love he felt for his mother in several of his most touching poems: *Mother*, *Woman*, *An old story*, etc.

Henceforward the boy lived through all the bitter experiences of a solitary, unloved childhood. His little sister—a year or two younger than himself—was sent as a boarder to the Nikolaevsky Institute, and the orphans might see each other only at rare intervals. Physically, Nadson was at a great disadvantage among his robust school-fellows; but gradually the charm and sincerity of his character and his superior abilities won him respect, and even a measure of popularity. But he formed no intimate ties in these uncongenial surroundings. Forced to create a spiritual atmosphere for himself, and to live alone with his doubts and aspirations, he began at this time to keep the intimate diary upon which the story of his life is based. All the dreamy and analytical sides of his character found an outlet in this monograph of a soul.

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Naïve, and at the same time unhealthily precocious, as some of his first entries appear, they show, nevertheless, remarkable powers of observation and psychological analysis in a child of twelve.

“To me, all humanity is divided into two halves: the Living and the Dead. The distinctive property of the living is the love of nature and a capacity for enthusiastic appreciation of its beauty, as well as a deep sense of our unworthiness beside all that is beautiful and lofty. Among my living people I class all artists, novelists, singers of national songs, bards, and a few dramatic writers. At the head of them I place the poets: Poushkin, Gogol, Lermontov, Nekrassov, etc., and a few people I have known of the feminine sex. To the dead belong teachers and merchants who are absorbed in their ledgers to the exclusion of all else. Not long since I observed people who belong to neither of these categories. This intermediary class forms the majority. They may find life or death according to the influences with which they come in contact.” More pleasing are his observations of outdoor life, which show, if not a rapturous communion with external nature, at least a delicate power of imaginative vision, in keeping with his sensitive, but not exuberant, disposition. “Already the snow is lying in all directions,” he writes in the autumn of 1876; “it is long since I saw a more wonderful winter’s day. The sky

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is perfectly clear save where the white diaphanous clouds scudding across it, half veil the dazzling blue like a mist of delicately woven, filmy lace. The sun is sinking and the whole square becomes gradually shrouded in shadow. Only the last rays still gleam like golden threads among the snow. Lingering as though loth to say farewell, their iridescent sparks still flash among the snow-flakes."

Nadson had been four years at the Military School when the loneliness of his life was interrupted by one of the few joys that ever fell to his lot. One half-holiday a school-friend invited him home, and this was the beginning of an intimacy which became a rare delight. His friend had an only sister, about Nadson's own age. It was the young man's first glimpse of a happy and luxurious domestic circle, and probably his first experience of friendly intercourse with a girl of sixteen. Moreover, all Nadson's sentiments were precociously developed, therefore it is not surprising that he fell in love with his friend's sister as passionately as Thomson with Matilda Weller, or young "Novalis" with Sophie von Kuhn. But Nadson's love had a staying power, a fibre of constancy and devotion, which has been lacking in the youthful passions of many greater poets. We cannot doubt from the confidences which now appear in his diary that this was no mere calf-love, but a passion

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which lifted him into a new world of emotion, and, by drawing him nearer to his fellow-men, saved him from the morbid self-contemplation which was the chief danger of his isolated position.

There could be no question of Nadson as an accepted suitor; but young as Helen D. was, she already had other admirers, and one in particular, who was admitted to privileges which would have been denied to the penniless young soldier. Yet, in spite of occasional stabs of jealousy, this period of Nadson's life was the brightest time in his chequered existence.

In the spring of 1878, a friend, to whom he alludes in his diary as "S. S.," began to take an interest in his poems and persuaded the editor of the Russian *World* (*Svet*) to publish his verses entitled "Dawn." The poem was so favourably noticed that the editor promised to consider further contributions. Thus simultaneously with love and friendship came the first hope of literary success.

Already the spiritual conflicts of his life had begun. Very early in his diary occurs the following entry: "I am forced to agree with Gogol when he concludes his story, 'Dead Souls,' in these words: 'Lord, *this* world is very wearisome.' Aye, but is there another? That is the question to which I can find no clear answer. . . . Such problems have begun to trouble me

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early, but, thank God, the earlier they are solved one way or the other the better. I know how serious is the solution of such questions, before which all else pales. God! If only I might soon decide this restless uncertainty, which seems to sap all my strength. What *are* the essential truths?"

It is not possible to follow this spiritual crisis to its conclusion, or to know precisely which way his doubts were solved, for here the pages of the journal were torn out by his own hand. The interruption extends over a period of many months, during which Nadson suffered one of the many cruel blows Fate seemed to keep in store for this sensitive and tender nature. The girl with whom he had enjoyed such pure and tender relations, and on whom he lavished all the pent-up passion of a solitary heart, died almost unexpectedly of a rapid decline. One brief entry in the journal records this dire event: "March 19th, 1879. She—our sunshine, our sweet little star—is set: passed away into that awful unknown darkness which we call death. God give peace to her soul." Not the least part of his suffering lay in the fact that he had no actual share in her destiny. That even in death he must stand aside and let others mourn her aloud, while his heart was wrung with a grief he might not express. The bitterness of this moment found an outlet in the poem entitled

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“Wherefore,” which will be found among the examples given at the close of this essay.

How passionately and faithfully the poet mourned the loss of his friend is evident in many of his verses, and particularly in those which—from time to time during his brief career—he specially dedicated to her memory.

Even when the first sting of grief was appeased, and life and youth began to assert their rights, he looked on this partial forgetfulness almost as a crime. Some years afterwards, writing to Plestcheiev on the subject of some verses which stirred up the memory of his unhappy love, he says: “There is something base and cowardly in this capacity for forgetfulness which lurks in the human heart.”

While his sorrow was at its height, Nadson had to go up for his final examination. He passed creditably; and entered upon the second stage of his military career at the Pavlovsky school. Here, at the very first drill, on a raw autumn day, he caught a severe chill, and his condition became serious. After some weeks spent in hospital, he was sent, at the Government expense, to recruit his health at Tiflis, in the Caucasus, where he remained for nearly a year.

The Caucasus, as M. Leroy Beaulieu has observed, has been to Russian poets all that Italy was to Byron and Shelley, and Switzerland to Rousseau. Nadson’s visit, under more favour-

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able conditions, might have been more fruitful of new emotions and poetic ardour. A few poems written at this time show that Nadson, whose life had been mainly spent among the dark forests and low-toned, misty plains of Northern Russia, was not insensible to Nature in her grander aspects ; but the period of his stay in the Caucasus was so overshadowed by physical and mental depression that he had no heart for sustained literary efforts. He had begun to realise more and more how ill-adapted he was for the career into which circumstances had forced him. His dream had been to enter a University or to win a scholarship at one of the Conservatoires, for he had a remarkable gift for music. But friendless and penniless as he was, his fate appeared without issue. His journal shows that he had touched the darkest depths of despondency. He was haunted by the ghastly phantom of inherited madness. In March, 1880, he writes: " Man should consist of flesh, bones, and nerves ; but I consist of bones and deranged nerves. This has a very strong influence on my intellect and reason. The death of 'S.S.', the death of Helen D., my sister's future, the sterile waste of gifts which I believe myself to possess, the wretched prospect of spending my whole life in the military service . . . all this is driving me to the madhouse and an early grave."

In this dark frame of mind, Nadson returned

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to Petersburg in the autumn of 1880, and re-entered the Pavlovsky school. But life in the capital brought some consolations to the poet.

The two years which followed was a period of increasing literary activity. He made the acquaintance of the poet Plestcheiev, editor of the Russian *National Review*, who offered to bring out some of Nadson's verses in this celebrated publication. But as Nadson's fame grew, his physical powers dwindled. "I am not to go to the great manœuvres," he wrote to a friend in August, 1882, "because I have 'a chronic affection of the right lung.' In plain words, I am consumptive."

In spite of his physical condition, he received his commission, and joined his regiment at Cronstadt. Here he enjoyed a brief, illusive return to health and energy. We read of his taking part in the social amusements of his comrades, but only to a very moderate extent. Unlike his compatriots, Poushkin, and more particularly Lermontov, he never knew "the wild joys of living," much less the excesses and satiety which were the bane of these Byronic spirits. His was "the heaven of the spirit," and he had neither opportunity nor desire to "glut his sense upon the world." Hence, perhaps, the delicacy of moral vision, and the clear voice of loyalty and resignation which give to his poems almost a feminine character.

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During the summer of 1883 he was laid up for many weeks in Petersburg and returned to Cronstadt in a wretched state of health. Nevertheless the winter of 1883-4 had to be spent on active service, and his sufferings were at times unbearable. He would probably have succumbed to them, had not a friend procured him a modest opening in the offices of a St. Petersburg paper, *The Week*. The prospects were far from brilliant, but Nadson lost no time in resigning his commission, and was thankful to accept even the humblest place in the republic of letters. Several of his poems subsequently appeared in *The Week*. A year later, the poet's health became worse. A few literary friends resolved to send him to the south of France. The Literary Fund advanced five hundred roubles, and with the help of a few generous individuals sufficient was collected to keep him abroad for a year. Nadson left for the Riviera in October, 1884. Like Keats, he was accompanied by a devoted friend, who remained with him all the winter, and whose hand closed the poet's eyes when, fifteen months later, he died at Yalta, the Mentone of Russia.

Letters now took the place of the journal in his daily life. From Nice he wrote to a friend in Russia : " My window is open wide, and through the lightly waving curtains the hot sun pours in a golden torrent.

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O Nice, O dazzling South !  
The glory blinds me.  
My thoughts would soar,  
But like a wounded bird they cannot rise.

These lines by Tioutshev are perpetually recurring to me under this clear sky, with the glare of the sun, the green hills, and the turquoise sea before my eyes. Hail to the flowery, fragrant, health-giving South ! Hail to the balmy tides and proud mountain-crests ! Yet God grant that in time to come I may welcome thee again, my dark, misty, but unforgotten North-land ! ” On his journey through Switzerland, Nadson—a true child of the steppe—passed through a tunnel for the first time ; an experience which seems to have vividly impressed his imagination : “ I thought of a black snake boring its audacious way through a vast mass of earth. I thought the hill might fall in with a crash, and the gorge would ring with a thousand mocking echoes, while train and engine would be reduced to matchwood. The lamp in the ceiling of our carriage scarcely sufficed to light it up. Every mouth seemed frozen into silence ; it was impossible to speak on account of the roaring and vibration. On every face there was a weird, livid reflection, and I began to feel creepy. The agony was drawn out, for the tunnel was a long one. Then patches of light gleamed on the walls, and soon I could distinguish fantastic

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smoke-wreaths. Another moment — then, like a band of whistling, screaming gnomes, we emerged from the black maw of the mountain. I could not restrain a cry of astonishment. Out of the window, on the left, was revealed an abyss of azure fire, a flood of dazzling light. It was the Lake of Geneva stretched far below us in the blue mist of a cloudless day. On the other side, piled one above another, glittered the snowy Alpine summits piercing the mist, and, towering over all, the kingly crown of Mont Blanc. Something shimmered vaguely in the depths below ; it was the famous castle of Chillon, with its white walls."

On his arrival at Nice, Nadson had to undergo two severe operations, and it was not before the end of January, 1885, that he was able to leave his room. Most of the poems written during his visit to France date from the early months of this year. These were : *A Page from the Past*, *The Cypress Trees*, *Once more the Moonlight Night*, two fragments of the unfinished poem *Buddha*, and many minor pieces. His first volume of collected verses was published during this spring.

Ardently attached to his native land, the beauty of the South and the light-hearted gaiety of the Carnival season could not compensate for his enforced exile. At Easter-tide his thoughts went back to Russia with intense yearning : "They

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keep Easter in all countries, but I think Christ only rises in Russia ; at least so it seems to me. I have always loved our Russian Easter; it is impossible not to be touched by the warm sentiment and the sense of equality with all mankind which it brings, if only for a few hours." He misses, too, the swift magic changes of the Northern spring : the odour of melting snow, the pungent aroma of fresh verdure, so familiar at home. Not even the almond tree, covered with rosy blossom, like a morning cloud, against a background of tender green, can be as dear to him as "the meanest onion that grows in a kitchen-garden in some suburb of Petersburg."

In June he was sent, as a last resource, to a private hospital in Berne, but nothing could arrest the progress of his disease, and the doctors advised his return to Russia. He accepted their decision as his death-warrant, but rejoiced at the prospect of seeing his native land again.

Having come to the end of his resources, Nadson was compelled, against medical orders, to remain in Petersburg until the autumn was far advanced. He then accepted an invitation to spend the remainder of the winter at a country-house in Podolia. When the spring came, he craved to take part in the activity of the world. In April he visited Kiev with a double object—first to obtain work on the staff of *The Dawn*, and secondly to organise an entertainment on

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behalf of the Literary Fund. In both matters he was successful. Thus he was able to repay a portion of the money advanced for his journey to the Riviera.

At this time the thought of death was always present with him. "Spring is in full bloom . . . but I know that I am welcoming it for the last time," he writes. Later in the year he retreated to a village near Kiev, from whence he could still carry on his work for *The Dawn*. Unfortunately, the summer proved unusually damp, and Nadson contracted a chill which brought on pleurisy. The doctors urged him to start for Greece without delay. But the poet refused to contemplate the idea of dying abroad, and by way of compromise consented to go to Yalta, where he arrived in an extremely exhausted condition.

One more blow, the cruellest and most humiliating of all his experiences, was still reserved for Nadson. On his arrival at Yalta he received the cheering announcement that he had been awarded the Poushkin Prize of five hundred roubles. But his satisfaction was almost immediately spoiled by the appearance in the *Novoe Vremya* of a series of wantonly cruel attacks from the pen of the influential critic Bourenin. It is said that Bourenin had been provoked by a critical article of Nadson's in *The Dawn*; but no ordinary provocation could justify the savage nature of his

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retaliation. Without actually mentioning Nadson's name, Bourenin made it perfectly clear that the winner of the Poushkin Prize was the object of his merciless invective. The poet was represented as a sickly parasite, living on the charity of others. Nadson replied by a vehement refutation of these slanders, which he sent to the *Novosti*; but, unfortunately, this letter was not published until after his death. Meanwhile, the offensive articles continued to appear in the *Novoe Vremya*, and the sick man was thrown into a frenzy of helpless indignation. Brain fever set in, and his condition was declared to be hopeless. He lingered many days in this state, praying in his conscious moments for the deliverance of death. At last, on January 19th, at nine in the morning, he passed into the desired haven of calm.

In the single volume of verse which represents the pathetic fulfilment of his hopes, we do not find the sustained eloquence of Poushkin, the energy and passion of Lermontov, the complete sympathy with the national sentiment which characterises the lyrics of Koltsov, nor the cry of rebellious despair which startles us in Nekrassov. His verse has been likened to the delicate, persistent vibration of the æolian harp rather than to the resonance of a deep-toned bell. Nadson was not associated with any great political or social movement. At the time when he made his

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reputation as a poet, the great upheavals had subsided and a period of lassitude and decadence had set in. Yet his popularity is incontestable, for his poems ran through ten editions in five years and entered into a fifteenth edition in 1897. In spite of his detractors, some of whom were probably actuated by enmity to his race, Nadson's success must be accounted intelligible and legitimate. The poet's personality seems to have reflected his pure idealism, and this, together with his trials and physical sufferings, undoubtedly appealed to the sympathy of the public. But apart from personal interest, his verses attracted by their melody, their easy lyrical grace, and, above all, by their almost feminine tenderness. They lack virility, for his is the true *voix larmoyante*, quivering with sensibility, veiled by regret, but breathing a note of sincere and intimate feeling. Nadson lived in the world of subjective emotions rather than in the realm of phantasy or action. Only in a very few poems—"To the memory of Dostoievsky," for example—does he forget his intense subjectivity and become for a moment one with his nation and humanity at large. Undoubtedly the poem which found its way most directly to the heart of his own discouraged and pitiful generation was the one beginning "My friend, my brother." To quote a charming phrase from Skabichevsky, Nadson's whole poetic personality is enclosed in this poem "like the sunlight in a

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single drop of limpid water." He touched a secret, spiritual note in his contemporaries, echoing their disenchantment and timid hopes for the future ; while in all he wrote the moral purpose is perhaps only too clearly evident. Without this defect—or quality—he would never have appealed so strongly to his own generation in Russia.

What Nadson might have accomplished under more favourable circumstances it is perhaps idle to inquire. Yet had he succeeded in obtaining the classical education which was his ideal, it seems improbable that he would ever have been imbued with the Greek spirit. It is more likely that, detaching himself more and more from the love of external beauty, and following the spiritual tendencies of many Russians, he would have preached the gospel of peace and pity according to Dostoievsky or Tolstoi. Possibly he was saved by a premature death from descending to the kind of poetry "that has a palpable design on us."

# Nadson : A Poet of the Decadence

## NADSON

### WHEREFORE ?

And was your love like mine ? 'Twixt doubts  
and fears

Did you long nights of sleepless anguish spend ?  
Or did you pray for her, through blinding tears,  
With all the strength that chastened love can lend ?

And since you looked your last, when, out of sight,  
We left her in earth's breast among the dead,  
Has all your life been broken, and your light—  
Your last pale glint of light—extinguishèd ?

Not so ! You live and hope, and still may see  
Your hopes fulfilled ; you go your haughty ways,  
Forgetting her ; perchance in mockery  
You smile to think that grief once claimed your  
days.

Ah, favoured child of Fate, caressed of Love !  
You never could her purest soul-depths stir,  
As I—though sick and weary—still could move  
Her interest and win sweet words from her.

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Then wherefore fell to *you* the harrowing bliss  
Beside her in the parting hour to stand,  
And press a lingering, last, impassioned kiss  
Upon the lifeless marble of her hand ?

And when in that last, bitterest of all hours  
The requiem-choir sang peace to her who died,  
Why should you strew her early grave with flowers,  
While like a stranger I must stand aside ?

O, had you guessed the silent, sullen ache  
Of hopeless loss that left my life in gloom,  
You would have moved aside for pity's sake,  
To let me stand chief mourner at her tomb.

*Translated by Rosa Newmarch.*

## IN MEMORY OF DOSTOIEVSKY

Lo, round the board, to impious orgies given,  
The revellers sit and feast in careless mood,  
Till o'er the banquet-hall the wrath of Heaven  
Bursts in a sudden storm of fire and flood ;  
The voices of the guests are silenced then,  
The laughing faces blanch i' the light'ning's blaze,  
And demi-gods are changed to mortal men :  
Belshazzar trembles, and the scoffer prays.

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The tempest passes—and with it their fears.  
The revels start afresh ; the chorus sings ;  
The wine in heavy amphoræ gleams clear,  
And on young lips the shameless laughter rings.  
Remorse from out the heart is driven afar ;  
All vie in ribaldry ; night waxes old,  
And o'er youth's festival the morning star  
Sees fiercer licence as each grows more bold.

One force alone can mortal folly sway—  
The might of Love ; and those fair works of art  
Through which Love's light has poured its healing ray,

Have power to sweep dishonour from the heart.  
Love—a pure star in selfish times—doth shed  
His heavenly beams on men of all estate ;  
Nor need they bend to him in servile dread,  
But prostrate for his benediction wait.

O happy Thou, who knew'st and taught'st Love's creed !

For thou shalt wear a more enduring crown  
Than cloistered monks can win ; thy holy deed  
Shall live among mankind ; in every town  
A cry of mourning shall go up for thee  
From those whom thou hast saved from sloth  
and gloom,  
And at thy death—like one vast family—  
All Russia shall join hands above thy tomb.

*Translated by Rosa Newmarch.*

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### MY FRIEND, MY BROTHER

My friend, my brother, whosoe'er thou be,  
Cast down by suffering, still keep heart of grace !  
Though wrong and falsehood lord it far and free  
Across the tear-drenched lands,  
Though guiltless blood be shed, and from their  
place  
Our fair ideals by sacrilegious hands  
Are rent, oh yet believe that Baal shall be hurled  
From off his throne, and Love renew the world !  
But not in fetters comes he, crowned with thorn,  
The victim's cross upon his shoulders borne,  
But girt with power and with glory dight,  
The torch of joy in outstretched hand alight !  
And then shall be no tears on earth, no hate,  
No gibbets and no tortures more, no slaves,  
No livid want, implacable as fate,  
No swords, no crossless graves !  
O friend, and this is not a dream ! 'Tis no  
Delusive hope ! For look around thee, mark  
And answer me—can evil fiercer grow,  
The night more dark ?  
Earth, slaked with streams of blood, enough has  
seen  
Of senseless wars that fill her ear with cries,  
And now to Love, the gentle and serene,  
She lifts imploring eyes !

*Translated by H. C. F.*

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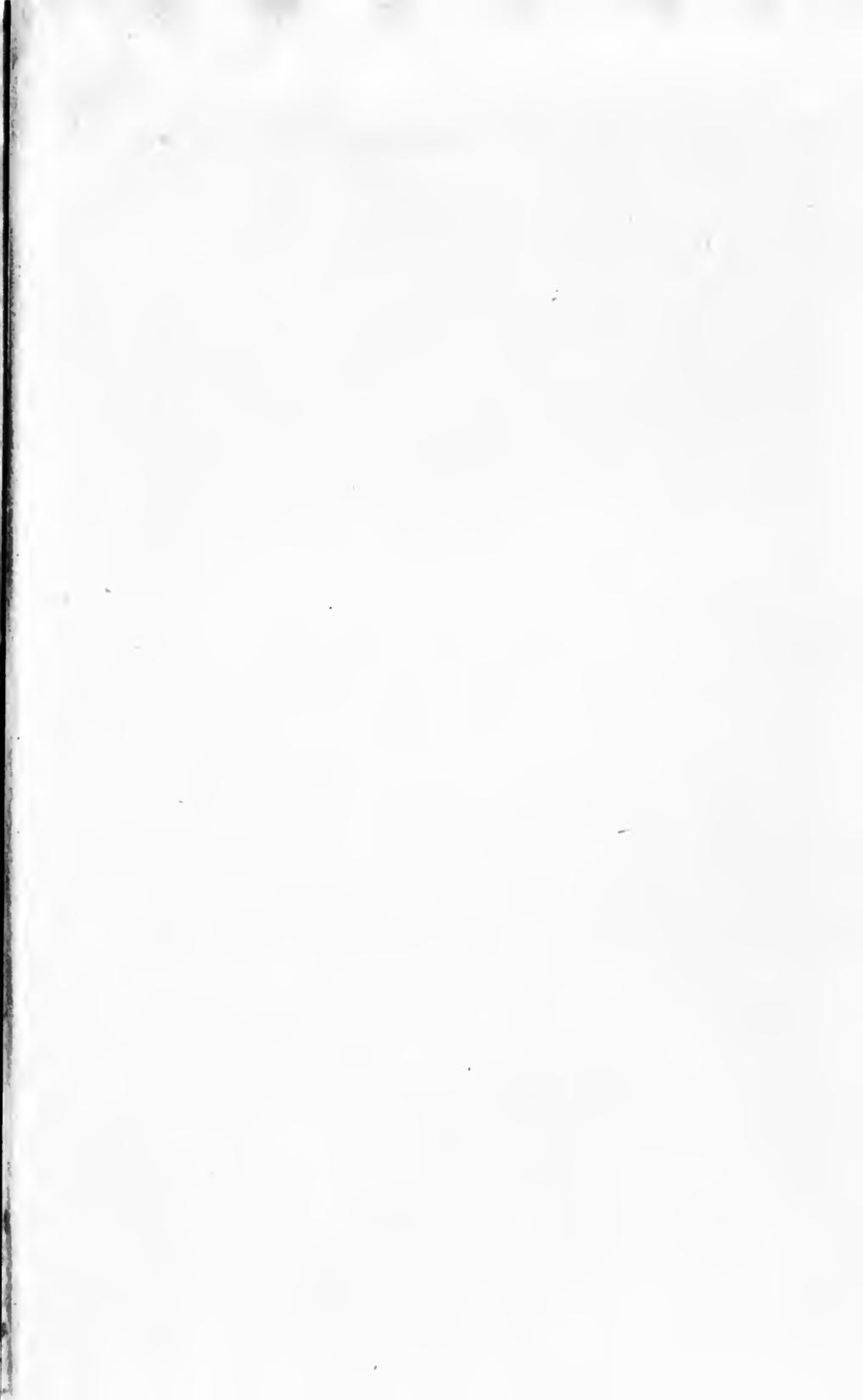
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